

Plain Talk On Acts

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PREFACE

" . . . and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost . . . " (Acts 2:4).

" . . . ye shall be witnesses unto me . . . " (Acts 1:8).

As we begin our study together of the Book of Acts of the Apostles, two groups of nine and six words, respectively, would seem to set the tone for the entire book. We have headed our introduction with these statements, and I would suggest that you ponder them for a moment or two, for their meaning for us today is just as important and potent as when they were first written down in this book.

This glorious book is full of incidents of the founding, growth and work of the early church. It records miracles and miseries, heights of joy and depths of suffering, and sets forth clearly the ministry of the Church of Jesus Christ then, today, and until He comes and receives us unto Himself.

Our attention is first claimed, as we shall see, by the ascension of our blessed Lord, and then by the coming of the Holy Spirit of God, to indwell the hearts of believers. To what purpose this infilling? That we may be witnesses! None of us is of any use at all, apart from the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

Five words in chapter 28 are highly suggestive. "and we came to Rome . . ." (v. 16). What tremendous experiences lay between the conversion of Saul on the road to Damascus and this calm statement at the end of the book. Let him tell us briefly:

" . . . in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep: In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren: In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches . . . "
(II Corinthians 11:23-28).

I feel confident that all of this was in Paul's mind as he neared Rome, and the writer of Acts put down the simple words, "and we came to Rome," the end of the long life of service.

As we study this Book of Acts together, let us ask God to speak to our hearts. "Ye shall be my witnesses . . . witnesses unto me," said our beloved Lord, as His feet left the earth and a cloud received Him from the sight of the watching disciples.

These chapters before us will set forth clearly all that is involved in "being a witness" for Christ.

Is this witnessing just one single act, Bible in hand, telling others about our Redeemer, crucified, risen, ascended, and seated at the right hand of the throne of God, in our behalf? No! We may well ask ourselves. How am I living, day by day? What are my inmost thoughts? Are they reflected in my conduct? Are my speech and my actions such as becomes a child of God?

Let us begin our study with prayer that when we reach the last verse, "Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him," we shall be different men and women, led more fully by the Spirit of God, taught by the example

of Paul and his fellow Christians, realizing that each one of us is, indeed, a vital part of the living church, "which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:23).

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CHAPTER ONE

(Introduction)

As a high school boy, I was impressed with Christianity as a religion. When I began to read books of history and geography, I found Christianity surprising. No prominent person really ever promoted the spread and development of the Christian Gospel. There has never been much money promoting it. It has never been pushed by some powerful military force. Actually, when you consider how the Christian church began, and think of the unfavorable conditions under which it developed, it is simply astonishing that it survived at all.

The Jewish people were neither prominent nor important in the recorded history of Rome, Greece, or Persia. When the Lord Jesus came into the world, Rome was the dominant power over all the Mediterranean. The Roman armies were the conquering armies. In those days, Judea and Galilee, the home of the Jews, were small, obscure provinces, and the Jewish people had been so badly defeated that they had no government of their own. This was the situation into which Jesus was born and in which He lived. His public ministry covered only about three years and He died as a young man, having been put to death by the Roman soldiers. His few followers were insignificant and discredited people. They faced stubborn hostility. The Jewish authorities opposed them. The Roman government opposed them and eventually came out in bitter persecution against them. It was as much as a man's life was worth to say that he was a Christian.

Even as a skeptic, I had to admit that this Christian Gospel had tremendous strength. It became a movement and crossed every barrier. It crossed the oceans, the deserts and the mountains. It leaped from one country to another. It spread around the world, and today it is being preached in more than a thousand different languages and dialects. From an historic point of view, Christianity is the most amazing phenomenon the world has ever seen. (p.13)

The early Christian church spread because it made a change in people. They were transformed. Even before I became a Christian, I had read enough to know that people were tremendously affected and lives were really changed by the Gospel. Homes were changed. Where there had been bickering, strife, dissension, and separation, people changed entirely and became loving, kind, thoughtful, generous, gentle and courteous. Communities were changed. Where they had once been given over to vice and violence, whole communities became virtuous. Even society was affected. New laws were entered into the books of the various countries, and people began to do unusual things for one another publicly because of the influence of the Christian Gospel.

The history of the early days of the Christian church is to be found in the Book of Acts. In the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John -- the four Gospels -- all tell about the Lord Jesus. And then comes the Book of the Acts of the Apostles -- the story of the early church. It reports the activities of these Christians who lived just after the Lord Jesus was taken away into heaven.

Everything that the Christian church has ever accomplished has depended upon the people, the individuals who make up the church. It is personal. Some of us are inclined to think that the church is a program. Some of us are inclined to think of the church as a crowd that meets in a certain building somewhere. However, when you look into the Book of Acts, you will find the essence and the vitality of the Christian church is in the people. The Christian church never established itself because it had a strong army. Nor did it have financial strength. In the third chapter of the Book of Acts, Peter said, "Silver and gold have I none." The Christian church is not some new economic principle, some new technological

discovery. It does not even have any unique pattern of organization. It is not a program.

There have been Christian churches founded under conditions where there could be no program. People have met in caves and have founded a Christian church. People have met in caves and stables and have produced a Christian church. They have met on a hillside, and they have met in the catacombs under Rome, risking their lives and not daring to show themselves in public. They had no program to follow, but they became Christians.

But there must be something unique about the Christian church. We read in the Book of Acts that people were astonished at the Christians. "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, (p.14) and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). That is the factor that makes the difference. "They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." Peter and John were considered unlearned, which means uneducated, not informed in book learning. They were fishermen, not scholars. They were not trained in the Old Testament law. The people in the court were astonished to find that Peter and John were unafraid; they stood boldly before the people. Maybe they could not match intellects with those to whom they spoke, but they were talking about something they knew. They had been eye-witnesses!

In the following pages we will be studying the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. We will see the record of the early Christians we will consider what happened just after the Lord Jesus left left world, when the Holy Spirit of God came into the hearts of His disciples and led them in their service for God. It will be the story of the first Christians who, as it was said of them, "turned the world upside down."

The word *Pentecost* marks one of the great events in Christian history. On that day, the followers of Jesus Christ were blessed by receiving the Holy Spirit. Did they pay for it? The answer is "No." Had they already accomplished great things for God to merit such blessing? The answer is, "No." Were they unusual people, each one of which was remarkable in his own field? The answer is "No."

They were quite ordinary people, for "God is no respecter of persons," and whosoever cometh will in no wise be cast out. While it is true that anyone can come, and that God is willing to receive anyone, it must be said over and over again that He will not receive people in *any way*. It is true that these men didn't pay silver or gold; it is true that they didn't pass through any special or rigid examination; it is true that they hadn't done a thing to merit the experience of Pentecost. But it is not true that it could have happened to just anyone in Jerusalem. It is not true that this could have happened to just anyone in the Roman Empire. It is not true that the Holy Spirit would come to anyone, anywhere, any time. Was there then something about these men that was different? And if so, what was this?

There was certainly one thing about these men that made them different. These were men who believed in God. They believed in the God of Moses, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, and the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. (p.15) They were people who believed the Bible. Today you will find many good people who do not believe in God. Pentecost will never happen to them. You will find intelligent people who do not believe in the God of the Bible. Pentecost will never happen to them. You will find kindly people and charitable people who do not believe in the living God. Pentecost will never happen to them.

The early Christians were men who believed. They believed in the God who created the heavens and the earth. When they looked out upon the whole world they were able to say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." When they looked at themselves, they did not think they just happened or evolved by happenstance, that they were just intelligent animals on the face of the earth. They felt that man had been created in the image of God. And I do not know any way to promise

the Holy Spirit to anyone who does not believe in the God of Genesis, the God of the Bible.

They believed God was the Creator and the judge. They believed God was the Saviour of men. They believed in the God of Noah and they believed that God could deliver a man out of trouble.

They believed in the God of Abraham, that God called Abraham out of his own country and took him into a new land, that Abraham walked by faith, that God received him and accepted him.

They believed in the God of Moses. There were no questions about the exodus out of the land of Egypt. They believed that the Israelites passed through the Red Sea, that they wandered in the wilderness and came into the Promised Land. They believed in the crossing of the Jordan and the fall of Jericho.

Not a single one of these people on the day of Pentecost had any question in his mind about any of these things. If a man cannot believe in the salvation of Israel out of the land of Egypt, if he cannot believe in the crossing of the Red Sea, in the coming of the manna every morning, in the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, in the story of Mount Sinai, and if he cannot believe in the entrance into the promised land, that man could never believe in the coming of the Holy Spirit!

These men at Pentecost believed in the God of Samuel -- the God of justice, the God who dealt honestly and fairly with everyone, as Samuel undertook to show the people in his day and time. These people believed the story of David. They believed that God had promised David that one of his flesh would sit on the Throne forever. They believed the story of the coming Messiah, the Christ who (p.16) would come to rule. They believed in the promise that was made to David that one of his own flesh would be the everlasting King of Kings and Lord of all.

These men believed in Elijah. They believed that Elijah could prepare the altar and lay on the sacrifice and call down fire from heaven, and the fire would come. If anyone could not believe that fire could come from heaven on the altar that Elijah built, how would he ever be able to receive the fire that came on the day of Pentecost when the tongues of fire were on each one of these people?

God will not come to a man who has no faith. While it is true that God will come to anyone, it is not true that God will come to everyone. The fact of the matter is that He will come only to those who believe in Him.

What kind of people were these men and women who received the Holy Spirit? What kind of men and women constituted that company? Not only were they men and women who believed in God, but they were also people who had heard Jesus Christ teach. These people had been with Him for a long time. The blessings of Christian experience are limited to people who know Jesus Christ! These people heard Jesus Christ teaching the things of God concerning His will.

Not only had these persons heard Jesus Christ, they had also seen Him. In some respects this was even more important. They might doubt the hearing of the ear. They might not know for sure that they understood what He said, but they saw Him. It was not so much that they saw His physical body, such as the color of His eyes, His hair, the width of His shoulders, or how tall He was; but that they saw Him heal the sick! They had seen people brought to Him that were sick with a fever, and the fever left them! They had seen Him raise the dead!

These men had seen the Lord Jesus stop a funeral procession and raise up the young man who was being carried to the burial ground. These are the men who stood outside the house of the rich nobleman, whose daughter was ill. They were told not to bother the Master any more because the daughter was dead. But the Lord Jesus took Peter, James and John into the house with Him, went up to the girl, took her by the hand, spake to her and lifted her up. They knew these things, for they had seen them happen. If you have doubts about the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, and if you do not believe these things, Pentecost will never happen to you! You will never know anything of the benefit, joy and gladness there

is in everything that happened on the day of Pentecost. (p.17)

These men had been in the boat when they saw the Lord Jesus walking on the water. They were just as frightened as you and I would be, thinking they saw a ghost. But Jesus spoke to them and said, "Be not afraid, it is I." These were men who looked on with awe and wonder when He turned around and commanded the wind and the waves to be still. There was a great calm then. That is not just poetry, nor a great exaggeration. As long as you think of this event as a fanciful exaggeration, Pentecost will never come to you. The great benefits of Christian experience are not going to come to you unless you believe in the mighty powers of God, displayed in the Lord Jesus Christ while He was here on earth.

In the land of the Gadarenes the Lord Jesus met men possessed with demons. He commanded those demons to get out, and they got out. People said, "What kind of man is this, that even the demons obey his voice?"

These men who experienced the blessings of Pentecost had seen all of this happen. They had seen Him stand silent in Pilate's court as He was falsely accused. They had watched Him face the violent opposition of people who cried for His death. They had seen Him when He was mistreated, and when He did not lift a hand in self-defense. These are the men who had witnessed Calvary. They saw Him die.

These are the men who previously had heard Him as He asked the question, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" And they had said, "Some say that thou art Elijah." Elijah was a great prophet and this was a great thing to say, but it was not true. "Some say that thou art Jeremiah." Jeremiah was a great preacher, and one of the great prophets of Israel. It was flattering for people to call Him "Jeremiah," but He was not Jeremiah. Remember how the Lord Jesus turned to them and said, "But whom say ye that I am?" These are the men who through the mouth of Peter said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." These are the men who received the benefits of the Holy Spirit of God.

After the people had followed Jesus for some time, hoping that He would restore the kingdom, some of them began to turn away from Him, and many "walked no more with Him." Then He turned to His disciples and said, "Will ye also go away?" Peter spoke up for all the disciples and said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

How were these Christians at Pentecost different from other people? So far we have taken note of two facts about them. First, they were men who believed in God, the God of the Bible. Second, (p.18) they believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Now, consider that these men were absolutely convinced that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead! They believed that Jesus Christ was alive! We read in the Book of Acts, "To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Only those who believe from the bottom of their hearts that Jesus is alive will ever receive the Holy Spirit of God in their hearts.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." I grew up as an unbeliever. I was an agnostic. One of my problems was that I could not believe that Jesus Christ is alive. I could think He was alive in the way that Shakespeare is alive; in the way Mark Twain or any other author or painter is alive, or in the way Napoleon is alive in France, or Luther is alive in Germany, or George Washington is alive in America. I could believe that He was alive in memory and in history as a continuing tradition. But that is not it. Instead, it is necessary to believe that He is just as much alive in heaven as I am here upon earth. It is absolutely essential that I have this kind of conviction if I ever want to receive the blessing of Pentecost.

The disciples were convinced that Jesus Christ was actually raised from the dead. These men had seen the open tomb. They had gone to that sepulchre and looked in. The body was not there. They knew it! They heard the testimony of others who had seen Him. Mary Magdalene and some of the disciples had seen Him face to face. Two disciples were going from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and Jesus walked with them. When they came to their home, He sat down at the table and broke bread with them. There were the disciples who went fishing on the Sea of Galilee. They saw Jesus on the bank, broiling fish on a fire, and He invited them to come and eat. These people actually, literally had dealings with, Him after He had been raised from the dead. They had no question in their minds but that Jesus was alive.

The disciples were present when He ascended into heaven. They went with Him up the Mount of Olives, and while they were standing there, He was taken away in full view of them all. He ascended into the clouds out of sight. These are the people to whom the Holy Spirit came! (p.19)

What kind of people were those who became the early Christians? So far, we have noticed that: (1) they believed in God; (2) they believed that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God; (3) they believed that the body of Jesus Christ was raised from the dead.

Now we see that they had still another characteristic. These men expected the Holy Ghost to come to them. Perhaps they did not know what was going to happen. But they believed that something would come to pass; that the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy would occur; and that the promise of the Father would come upon them. They lived in expectancy.

The Lord Jesus had told His disciples, "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 24:49). They had been given a commission to go unto all the world, but first they must wait for the Holy Spirit to come. Every day they waited for something to come to them.

Perhaps you are living your life day in and day out with no expectation. You are not looking for anything to happen. In this case, nothing will happen, and you will just simply exist.

If we are going to receive something from the Lord, we need to have this expectation, this sense of a promise that especially applies to us.

The Lord Jesus told the disciples, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you" (Acts 1:8). While they did not know what the coming of the Holy Ghost would be like, they knew it would happen. They knew the Old Testament prophecies. "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh." They knew about the preaching of John the Baptist, who talked about the coming of the Messiah. John said, "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire." They had been told by the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth."

Jesus also said, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things" (John 14:26). They expected the Holy Spirit to come to them. Then Jesus made this remarkable statement. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (John 16:7). In order to be among those who can receive the Holy Spirit and enter into the fullness of Christian experience, we will need to have this expectation of the Holy Spirit. (p.20) We need to be thinking that God is going to do something to us and for us.

In what other way were these members of the early Christian church qualified to receive this great blessing? They were different from the world in the fact that they were commissioned to serve. They had been given something to do. The words of Jesus, "As my Father hath sent me, so send I you," applied to these men, and they accepted the job.

God sent forth His Son to seek and to save the lost. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). When the Lord Jesus left this world, He commissioned His followers to go on doing His work. They are the ones who received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. They were the disciples who gathered together in the Upper Room. After He left, they were the ones who spent ten days in prayer, and in fellowship, waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Every single one of these people were included when the Lord Jesus said to them, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel." They had heard Jesus say, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 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: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:18-20). In this simple statement, which we call the Great Commission, the Lord Jesus gave His people the task of going into all the world to tell people everywhere that anyone who will yield himself to God through the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved forever. This is the task they were given to do.

We, too, have been given this Great Commission. We, too, have the responsibility to serve the Lord in a specific way. We are to show the world the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we will do this, we will be among these who can confidently expect the fullness of God's blessing.

The deeper benefits of Christian experience, the greater joys of belonging to the Lord, are only available to people who accept the idea that they have a mission. Only commissioned men will receive the fullness of the blessings of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is never given a person so that he can enjoy Him alone. He is never (p.21) given the Holy Spirit just to feel good. The Holy Spirit is given that a man may do something.

The Holy Spirit is always given to a person to whom the Lord has given a task. The Holy Spirit strengthens and enables him in the performing of that task.

Perhaps you may be wondering whether you could ever hope to be used and blessed as these early Christians were. The truth is that you can. (p.22)

CHAPTER TWO

(Acts 1: 1-26)

This book begins differently than most books. There is no title. We have called it The Acts of the Apostles, but we are not sure that this was the title that was originally used. Also, there is no announced theme. We are not told that this is going to be a book about some specific subject, or concerning some problem. It is actually a continued story. The author of this book apparently wrote the gospel of Luke, which begins in the same way.

Notice the first sentence:

The former treatise [the word treatise means letter, pamphlet, or booklet] have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

These four verses tell us what the author will be talking about. He will talk about the things which followed the Lord's ascension, according to the third verse. The most important thing the Lord Jesus did in those forty days between His resurrection and ascension was to show "himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs." In those forty days, He appeared from time to time to this small company of believers to prove to them beyond any question that He was actually raised from the dead.

In entering into the full experience of Christian life, and becoming a full member of the church as the body of Christ, we must know beyond question that Jesus Christ is alive. We must have a personal conviction that Jesus Christ is really alive and that He was raised from the dead. (p.23)

Before I became a Christian, I thought that being a Christian was all a matter of proper conduct and good morality. If anyone was going to help me to be a Christian, I thought it would be natural for them to tell me what to do and how to do it. However, notice what happened after the Lord Jesus was raised from the dead. He did not spend any time telling His disciples how to act, or how to behave themselves. He knew they would know how to do these things naturally if they understood the one thing He took special pains to tell them. He wanted them to be absolutely sure without the slightest question, without the least quiver of hesitation in their hearts or minds, that He, Jesus Christ, was actually, really, truly, alive, raised from the dead.

There were many infallible proofs which you could not question. For one thing, the grave was empty. Peter and John went in and looked. The grave was empty! The body was gone! That was something they couldn't deny. Secondly, two disciples were walking home from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the night of the resurrection, and a third person -- the Lord Jesus Himself, came and walked with them. As they walked this distance of about eight miles, He talked with them about the Scriptures, and their hearts burned within them as He talked.

When they came to their home, the Lord Jesus made as though He would have gone further, but they constrained Him, saying that it was toward evening and the day was far spent. They said, "Abide with us." The Lord Jesus went in and sat down at the table. He took bread and break it and gave thanks. When He did this, their eyes were opened, and they saw that He was the Lord, and immediately He disappeared from their sight. That very hour they hurried all the way back to Jerusalem, those eight miles, and

told the other disciples in great excitement that they had seen the Lord. "He was known of them in the breaking of bread." They had actually seen Him.

While they were speaking, the Lord Jesus appeared to them again, and said: "Peace be unto you." "But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit" (Luke 24:36, 37). They thought they had seen a ghost. "And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself." He referred to His hands and feet because He had been crucified. Nails had been driven through Him, and He was going to show them the actual prints, the actual scars of those nails. Then He said, "Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet." He showed (p.24) them the scars and the gashes which the nails had made. There was no question about it. This was the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. "And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave Him a piece of . . . honeycomb. And He took it, and did eat before them."

This is scientific, experimental proof, for a ghost could not eat food. Jesus intended to show them that His was a literal body, the body which had been raised from the dead. This was an infallible proof, which could not be questioned. It was not just a matter of seeing with their eyes, but they were to put their hands on Him and assure themselves that it really was true.

Why do you suppose He went to this much trouble? Because it is important for you to believe that the body of Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. If His body was raised from the dead, heaven is real, God is real and eternal things are real.

Another of these infallible proofs took place when Jesus had shown Himself alive to the disciples and had come to them in the Upper Room. "But Thomas, one of the twelve . . . was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe" (John 2:24, 25). Thomas was sure they were mistaken and that they must have seen some kind of optical illusion. "And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing." In that moment Thomas believed and answered, saying, "My Lord and my God." And then Jesus told him, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

This is where you come in. You are living 1900 years after these things happened. You have been told about it in the Scriptures, but you were not there. You do not have the opportunity, such as Thomas had, to put your finger in His nail prints and your hands into His side. You do not need this opportunity, however. You can just remember what He said. "Thou hast seen me and thou hast believed. Blessed are they which have not seen and yet have believed." It is not an easy thing to believe. The word is, "Be not faithless, but believing." This is the first prerequisite to full Christian experience. Jesus Christ was actually, literally raised from the dead. He is alive now. We may have dealings with Him. (p.25)

Now, look at Acts 1:4. "Being assembled together with them, [He] commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me." This expression, "the promise of the Father," refers to the coming of the Holy Spirit.

"For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts 1:5). John the Baptist preached the message of repentance for the remission of sins. He urged people to repent before God, in order that their sins might really be taken away by the grace of

God. He baptized with water, symbolizing the washing away of our sins. "But ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." John himself said that would happen. He said, "He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matthew 3:11).

"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

You may remember that John the Baptist finished his ministry in prison, awaiting his death. He was beheaded in prison. Just before his death, he sent two of his disciples to the Lord Jesus to ask Him a question. "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?" In the first epistle of Peter the prophets of the Old Testament were reported as "searching what time, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." This interest in the setting up of the kingdom of God here upon earth and the restoring of the kingdom of Israel according to the promises, was not an unnatural interest, nor was it an unscriptural interest. The Lord Jesus did not rebuke them for that. He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power."

Jesus said nothing about restoring the kingdom to Israel. All He said to them was, "It is not for you to know the time . . ." He did not deny that the kingdom would be restored. It is quite possible that the disciples did not fully understand what "restoring the kingdom" would imply. This does not teach on the one hand that the kingdom will be restored to Israel, nor does it deny it on the other hand. We are given no guidance about that in the Lord's answer at all.

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the (p.26) earth" (Acts 1:8). Jesus directed their attention away from the restoration of a kingdom to Israel to personal power for witnessing. Power means effectiveness. We will be made effectual. We will be so blessed of God that our testimony will have an effect upon people. We shall be witnessing with power.

In the eighth verse, you have a sweeping view of the whole program of the church, as well as an outline of the Book of the Acts: ". . . In Jerusalem" -- at home; "in all Judaea" -- in your family; "in Samaria" -- among your neighbors; "and unto the uttermost part of the earth." It is as if you dropped a stone into a pool of water, and the waves would go out from the point of impact to the shore lines on all sides. So it is with the Gospel. The Gospel will fall into your own heart, radiating into your home, then into the circle of your relatives and friends, then to your neighbors, and then to the uttermost part of the earth. Surely Christian experience begins at home. It begins in your heart when the Holy Spirit comes to you and then it spreads out "unto the uttermost part of the earth."

When I became a Christian, I began hearing many new words. These were English words which I could say, but I had no idea what their meaning was. I remember when I first told someone about becoming a Christian. That person said to me, "You have been converted." I had never heard that word used that way before, although I was a school teacher at the time. I turned to him and said, "What do you mean, I have been converted?" This person then explained that the word *conversion* defines the experience of a person who comes from unbelief to faith.

I was talking about the Lord's return one time and someone said to me, "Oh, I see you believe in the second advent." I did not have an idea in the world what he meant. I did not know about the first advent, let alone the second! Another rather strange word is the word *ascension*. You do not hear it on the street or read it in the newspaper. All that we know about the ascension is right here in the first chapter of Acts.

What do we mean by the ascension? "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). The disciples were out in the open country on a hilltop where they had been talking with the risen Lord. He had appeared before them again, as He had done many times during the forty days after His resurrection. They must have felt strange indeed to be talking to a man who had been dead and who had been raised from the dead. But there He was! While they stood there talking and looking at Him, He was taken up, (p.27) and a cloud in the sky received Him out of their sight. They actually saw it happen. It was not a dream or a vision.

We understand from other passages of Scripture that He ascended to the right hand of God the Father, who is on the throne. He is interceding on our behalf and waiting the day when the Father will send Him back into this world to establish the kingdom of God in open, plain sight before everyone. That is the way the Bible says it will be.

"And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? 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 1:10, 11).

Jesus had appeared and disappeared a number of times during those forty days. He appeared to them when they were gathered together in the Upper Room, and when He had finished speaking with them, He disappeared. If all He wanted to do was to get away, He had only to disappear. But that is not the way the ascension was accomplished. The disciples were brought out of the city to Mount Olivet. From the top of this mountain, He ascended into heaven, in plain view of them all.

There is one thing Christian people cherish. It is the hope of seeing loved ones after they have left this world. Embodied in this hope is the expectation that they, themselves, will live again. There is the confidence that God is, and that God sees them, and that He cares. All these things are reinforced in your mind when you consider the ascension.

"While they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel." We are reminded of the verse in Luke describing the resurrection: "And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:4, 5).

In his account of the resurrection, Matthew tells us "there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it" (Matthew 28:2, 3). Lest you would think that this angel of the Lord is just some supernatural power that brought this to pass, the next verse says, "His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men." At the time of the resurrection of Jesus Christ angels were here on earth. Skeptics laugh at this. (p.28) People sneer because they do not believe the Bible. But why should you believe the skeptics? Why should you pay any attention to the sneer of the unbeliever? Why not take this matter just as it reads? This is what happened.

"Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the Mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren" (Acts 1:12-14).

These are the men and women whose testimony spread, and shook the world of that time. It was not because they were intelligent; not because they were strong; not because there were many of them; not because they had some unusual gifts or talents, or had unusual diligence, or a special policy, or a superior way of doing things. No, these were people who had seen the Lord Jesus Christ after His resurrection. They had seen His power. Not only had they seen the body of Jesus Christ taken up into heaven, but they had been told that He would return from heaven in the same way in which He had gone up.

The disciples went back to Jerusalem to wait for the promise of the Father which the Lord Jesus had said He would send to them. They may have been quite vague in their minds as to what to expect. You could read the Old Testament carefully, although you would not get much of an idea what Pentecost would be like. But God had promised that He would send His Holy Spirit among them, and they were waiting. The Lord Jesus had told them they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence. John the Baptist had told them that the Lord Jesus would baptize them with the Holy Spirit. Whatever that meant, they expected it. And so they waited.

Notice what happened. "These all continued with one accord." They went into an Upper Room, and there they gathered together with one accord in a prayer meeting -- which we commonly call a ten-day prayer meeting. For ten days these people waited on God with prayer and supplication. About 120 people were there in the Upper Room. It does not mean that they locked themselves in, but during these ten days their main occupation was prayer.

What could a person pray about that would take so much time? Prayer includes thanksgiving; it includes meditation. You meditate upon His Word and His ways and His works. Prayer includes (p.29) praise. You praise Him for what He is, and give Him thanks for what He has done. Prayer includes supplication. Supplication means you make requests. What were these early Christians asking God for? No doubt they were asking God for what He had promised. As we read in the gospel, "Shall not the Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" These people were probably waiting before God and saying, "Lord, do it to us. Do what you promised to do."

They were confidently expecting that God would fulfill His promise, that He would baptize with the Holy Spirit of God. Here, you can see the secret of spiritual achievement. Suppose you want to have something done in your life spiritually. Have in mind that Jesus died for you, and most important, that He was raised from the dead. Then have in mind that He ascended into heaven. He is in the presence of God right now, praying for you. With all those things in mind, wait on the Lord. He will give you a blessing from Himself that will guide and strengthen you in the performance of the task to which you are now committed.

However, it is not always simply a matter of waiting. These people were waiting in these ten days, that is true; but during the time they were waiting something important happened. "And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,) Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus" (Acts 1:15, 16). Peter brought something to their attention. He pointed out there was something wrong. It does not mean that anyone had been especially disobedient. It just meant things were not right.

In spiritual experience, as we grow and mature, we become conscious that something we have tolerated for some time is wrong and should be corrected. Correction occurs as we grow into more blessing. As we grow more mature in Christian experience, we correct faults and failings. This is not to say that a thing is necessarily wrong in the sense of disobedience. This is not necessarily to say that something has been done that would be especially offensive to God. But something is just not right.

For example you might see a certain thing happen in the experience of a four-year-old boy, and know that it happened because he is four years old. When he gets to be six years old, you do not expect him to do that particular thing any more. He is older, and he ought to change his ways. What would be all right for a four-year-old boy is not going to be all right for a fourteen-year-old boy. When a boy gets to be fourteen, you do not want him to act as if (p.30) he were four. Now, he still might do certain things when he is fourteen that are not all right. He thinks that is the way it ought to be done, and you know he ought to do it differently. You can understand that, and put up with it, because, after all, he is young. He is just fourteen years old. But when he gets to be twenty four, you do not expect that of him. You expect to see a change in him.

It is like that in spiritual experience. A young Christian may do things and have certain interests that are not as good as they should be. He is interested in lesser things. He is too preoccupied with ideas of his own, rather than ideas of God. However, as he grows in spiritual experience, the Holy Spirit will make him aware of these limitations. And some things that he had not questioned at all may suddenly come to his mind.

In the first chapter of the Book of Acts, there were only eleven apostles. The Lord Jesus had chosen twelve. He chose these twelve to be His servants. One among them turned out to be a traitor, so there were only eleven who were obedient. That is not as it should be. The disciples then chose the twelfth apostle, by casting lots. "They prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen And they gave forth their lots" (Acts 1:24, 26).

We do not know too much about their use of lots, but it is a good deal like tossing a coin in the air to see whether it is "heads or tails." It was a matter of discovering, as it were, by way of luck. You might wonder why that was used in Bible times by the early church. That is the way people made decisions in those days. This is the only case recorded in the New Testament of the early church casting lots. There is no evidence after Pentecost that they ever used the lot as a way of deciding things. For instance, in Acts 13 we read about the selection of Paul and Barnabas to go on the mission field. They were not chosen by lot. The Holy Spirit said, "Separate unto me Saul and Barnabas for the work whereunto I have called them." It is an interesting commentary that before the coming of the Holy Spirit, they made decisions by casting lots. (p.30)

CHAPTER THREE

(Acts 2:1-40)

There is nothing quite like the Christian church. The very structure of its life is different from anything else on earth. Any church is more than just a group of people meeting for fellowship or service. They are gathered together because of a personal relationship to Jesus Christ and to one another through Him, for He is ". . . the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:22, 23). In the center, you have Jesus Christ. He is not an idea, nor a system of doctrine. Christ is a person. The Bible speaks of Him as the Son of God, the King of kings, the Lord of lords.

He was a great teacher, but other men have been great teachers, too. It is the personal presence of this living Christ that makes the difference. Our Lord Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). That does not mean His thoughts, nor the idea of His platform are present. It means that He Himself is there in the midst. The Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "I will not leave you comfortless [orphaned]. I will come to you . . . The Comforter, . . . whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things" (John 14:18, 26). This is what characterizes and distinguishes the Christian church -- the presence of Christ through the indwelling Spirit.

We understand and teach that the Holy Spirit has come into the heart of each believer to dwell there. We know He does not have a physical body, for the Holy Spirit who comes into the heart is God, the third person of the Godhead. The first time that the Holy Spirit came into the hearts of believers was on the day of Pentecost, as the Spirit made them aware of the living, Christ within them. The Lord Jesus Christ is now my Head, your Head. He is the Head of all believers, just as He is the Head of the church. Personally, as a Christian, I am a member of His body. What He wills to do in Himself, as my Head, becomes my intention. What I feel in me I ought to do and what I want to do, is because He wills to do it. (p.32) You remember how Paul, in writing to the Philippians, said, "it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (2:13)? The Christian who becomes conscious of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ within, wants to obey Him and please Him. This affects the direction of every effort, the undertaking of every action, and the performance of every work.

Many people who have studied the Book of the Acts of the Apostles have noted the great achievements of the early church. The early church accomplished what it did in spite of the fact that the people were not wise or clever. It was God who was working in them by His Holy Spirit to accomplish His purpose. We notice in the Book of Acts that they had boldness to witness to the Lord Jesus Christ (4:13). When Peter and John stood in the court, the people took knowledge of them, and they were amazed. The members of the council were astounded that Peter and John, these unlearned fishermen, were so bold in their testimony. The Holy Spirit prompts Christians to act as witnesses, and the witness tells what he has seen and heard. This tone of personal testimony and witness gave a boldness to the early church to bear witness to what Jesus Christ had done. The early church was faithful in its testimony, faithful in its preaching, faithful in its ministry, faithful in seeking the lost. Its members were effective in the face of the opposition that came against them. They gave their witness and their testimony "and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

If we are not careful, we will begin to think what wonderful people these early Christians were. If we are not careful, we will begin to say, "They must have been marvelous men." However, we need to re-

member the words that say, "It is not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord" (Zechariah 4:6). This is the real secret of all the achievements of the early church, and the real secret of the church down through the ages.

In the second chapter of the Book of Acts, we read about the most amazing event that happened in the early church. We commonly call it *Pentecost*. "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place" (Acts 2:1). The day of Pentecost does not refer to one twenty-four hour day. The word "Pentecost" means fifty days. This was a period of time covering fifty days. Actually, it was fifty days from the time of Christ's resurrection until the day of Pentecost was fully come. You remember He was alive for forty days, showing Himself alive by many infallible proofs. After He ascended into heaven, the disciples gathered together in the Upper Room, praying for ten days. Adding (p.33) forty and ten together, you have the fifty days, which is the full time of Pentecost.

Actually, the word *Pentecost* comes from the Jewish calendar. It refers to the time of the harvest. Fifty days from the time that the first fruits of the harvest were gathered in was the time which the Jews called "harvest home." It was the end of the harvest. At the end of the harvest they held a big celebration, very much like our harvest home celebrations that we have in some communities in the Fall of the year. In our day we have the first tomatoes of the season or the first Irish potatoes of the season. We have the first bale of cotton or the first load of wheat. There was, in the Jewish calendar, a time when they would speak of the first fruits. That is when the first harvesting was done. They allowed fifty days for the time of harvest, and then there would be the big celebration, bringing Pentecost to an end. The actual period of Pentecost was the period of harvest. Thus, when Pentecost had finally come to an end, they were all with one accord in one place.

Notice the expression, "All with one accord in one place." This expression "with one accord" sounds so simple, but you know how difficult it is to achieve. It means a complete agreement among the Christian disciples. "With one accord in one place" means yielded obedience, and this is a prerequisite for God's blessing. Where "two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them" (Matthew 18:19). Quarreling between members of the church disqualifies that church from receiving blessing. Dissension in a congregation hinders it from receiving the blessing of God.

This is true also in the home. Until you reach a point of basic agreement with the other members of your household, heaven's door of blessing will be shut to you. If you cannot reach the place where, in your heart, there is nothing against any member of the family, you will not be able to pray. In I Peter 3:7, Peter stressed this very clearly: "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered." Be not bitter against your wife, your husband, your parents, your children. In accordance with Colossians 3:19, "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them."

With an aching heart, you may say, "But you don't know how it is in my family." Perhaps I don't, but God knows! A humble, meek and quiet spirit can go a long way toward promoting good will in your family. Seek in every possible way to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. You may have to differ with a brother in the (p.34) Lord, or a member of your family, for some people are on the wrong road, and you cannot travel with them, but you do not need to be "bitter against them." You may not be able to agree with them, but you can be kind in your disagreement.

"So, as they were all with one accord in one place, suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost,

and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:2-4).

As a young Christian, I was troubled about that "mighty rushing wind" being inside that house. How could you have a big wind in the house? However, the disciples did not have the wind; they had only the sound, a sound *as of* a mighty rushing wind. Incidentally, those tongues were like as of fire. We do not know of what they consisted.

In the Scriptures, the names "Holy Ghost" and "Holy Spirit" are used interchangeably to refer to the Third Person of the Trinity. In the Greek language there is no difference, there being only one word in the Greek language, which was translated sometimes as "Ghost" and sometimes as "Spirit." The English translators, as they *prepared* the King James version of the Bible, followed the general principle of giving variety whenever possible. They used a different term whenever it was convenient to do so. Sometimes they spoke of people being under the possession of demons, and, other times, under the possession of devils. The words "demons" and "devils" are derived from the same Greek word. This verse which has been translated, "they were all filled with the Holy *Ghost* and began to speak with other tongues as the *Spirit* gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4), could also be translated "they were all filled with the Holy *Spirit* and began to speak with other tongues as the *Spirit* gave them utterance."

Regarding the phrase, "they began to speak with other tongues," we have in our day some Christians who speak in tongues. Some people will ask whether the modern speaking in tongues is similar to this instance on the day of Pentecost. If you will look at it, you will see there are differences. The modern experiences are usually more like the instances recorded in I Corinthians 12 and 14.

In Acts 2:5-13, you will find that people had come to Jerusalem from many different parts of the Mediterranean world. Though they spoke different dialects and languages, each one heard the Gospel in his own language. "They were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue [in our own dialect] (p.35) wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elarnites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God" (Acts 2:7-11).

"And they were all amazed and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine" (Acts 2:12, 13). Perhaps you have had people come to your house, to talk to you about the Bible; perhaps they have given their personal testimony, and have told about their experience. Perhaps you were amazed at the stories they told and wished you had the same experiences. At a time like that, the mockers and the scorners come saying, "These men are full of new wine." That seems ridiculous, but still, who is to say? After all, these mockers were strangers. They had not seen them drinking but that is the way rumors get started. Here is a little lesson for each one of us; do not pay full attention to every negative word you hear.

"But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day" (Acts 2:14, 15). In answer to the remark of the mockers that the disciples were drunk, Peter rose up and said, "These men are not drunken, seeing it is but the third hour of the day."

Suppose someone you know became so deeply moved in prayer that he fairly shouted. A passerby might say, "Oh, he's drunk." What would be a very normal reaction on your part? Wouldn't it be resentment? Wouldn't you rush to defend the friend? Wouldn't you begin to explain that your friend didn't drink at all? But Peter did not defend the disciples on that basis at all. He did not tell the crowd that they

made a mistake about these men, and that they were all good men who never got drunk. There was no disposition whatever to take offense because they had been falsely accused. The interest was in speaking the truth.

In order to inform the public, Peter told them that these people could not be drunk, because it was not even the right time of day. It was only nine o'clock in the morning and it isn't normal for a person to have taken much wine at that time of the day.

Some day you may be falsely and unfairly accused. Someone, might find some aspect of what we are doing to hold up to ridicule or to suspicion. Peter's example teaches us that we are not to hurry to our own defense. We should not start arguing about it. Peter (p.36) simply pointed out that this accusation did not make sense and then he left it on that basis.

"But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:16-18). Isn't it interesting that when Peter undertook to explain what was happening to those disciples, he turned to the Old Testament Scriptures! Why didn't he describe their psychological and emotional experiences? The fact that these people were filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues had a certain meaning, and this is found in the Old Testament prophet Joel, giving the experience an authority. This is what God had promised He was going to do.

"And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come" (Acts 2:19, 20). These events as they are quoted by Peter, were not fulfilled on that day of Pentecost but the events in verses seventeen and eighteen were fulfilled, for God did pour out His Spirit upon all flesh, and the sons and the daughters did prophesy. But Peter here describes something which will happen in the natural world. The sun, moon and stars will be affected; there will be signs such as blood, fire and vapor of smoke, earthquakes and pestilence. You will remember something like that mentioned in the gospel of Matthew, and you will read something like that in the Book of Revelation. You will also find a like description in II Peter. All of these references deal with the end of the world.

But Peter quotes the whole passage from Joel, half of which was fulfilled and half of which was yet to come. He is saying, in effect, that what happened on the day of Pentecost is a piece of the same cloth as that which will appear at the end of the world. In other words, this is God's dealing in connection with His great purpose through His Messiah, in which He is going to bring things to pass on the face of the earth.

All the promises of God in the Bible come to their fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ. When the Lord Jesus Christ came, it was the fullness of time of God's plan. The promises that He made to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and which run all through the Old Testament Scriptures are finally fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God; His dying for us (p.37) on Calvary's cross as the sacrificial Lamb of God; His being raised from the dead; His ascension into heaven and His presence at the right hand of God; His high priestly function to pray for us; and His coming again to establish the kingdom of God on the face of this earth; all these are in the one great purpose to God. The Bible speaks of this as the day of the Lord, the time when God Himself will work through His Messiah.

The Lord Jesus Christ came into this world to die for us, and then He was taken up into heaven to pray for us. Now He is sending the Holy Spirit to indwell us and to guide us and some day He will come

again, to judge and to rule. All this is *one* great program of God's work through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, ". . . before that great and notable day of the Lord come." The word *come* does not refer only to the beginning, but to the whole continuing program, including the end of it. You could say, "before that great and notable day of the Lord has fully come *to pass*." Peter linked up what happened on the day of Pentecost with what is going to happen at the end of the world, all being part of what God is going to do through Christ Jesus.

"And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). And that is true, even unto this present day.

When people speak about being a Christian, they think of a certain way of living. They have in mind the characteristics of kindness, faithfulness and honesty in one's own personal life and on behalf of other people. But in Acts 2 we find that the way in which the Christians live is just a secondary, not a primary matter. People do not become Christians because they develop a certain type of character. The basic truth of the Christian church and the individual Christian rests in the Person of Jesus Christ. The most tremendous thing that ever happened in this world occurred when the Creator of the heavens and the earth sent His Son to earth in the form of a man, Jesus of Nazareth. When He lived in this world, He was God in human form, and when He died, it was the Son of God who died. When He was raised from the dead, it was God who was raised from the dead. When He was taken back into heaven into the presence of His Father, the way was open for human beings to be brought into the presence of God. That is a summary of the remarkable truth, presented in Acts 2.

"Ye men of Israel, bear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs . . ." (Acts 2:22). Jesus Christ was certified by God. He was commended to you for your confidence and your trust. He was commended to you by (p.38) the very power He exercised. No man could do such things as He did, unless God be with Him. If you take away the miracles, you could still talk about Him being a good and kind man, but you might forget that He was actually *God*. The miracles accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ were not the result of human power, nor manipulation, nor psychic power. They were acts of God.

"Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God . . ." (Acts 2:23). God knew what would happen to Jesus of Nazareth when He sent Him into this world. All this was in the plan of God. He knew perfectly well that human beings were going to put His Son to death; He willed it thus.

Let us quote the passage in full: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it" (Acts 2:23, 24). Then Peter quotes an Old Testament passage again. Here is something that is very important. When Peter talked to these people in Jerusalem, he didn't talk to them about the empty grave and about the testimony of the centurion who saw what happened on the day of the crucifixion. He didn't present these human evidences. What did he talk about? He quoted Old Testament Scriptures. This event that happened had its real meaning in the promises of God and is not to be looked at as an unrelated occurrence. It is to be considered in the plan and purpose of God.

"For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance" (Acts 2:25-28). This passage sounds as though David is talking of himself.

However, Peter clarified this matter: "Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day" (Acts 2:29). Peter says that apparently David was not speaking of himself. "Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne" (Acts 2:30). In other words, David knew that one of his own flesh would sit on the throne. "He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ" (Acts 2:31). Although the quotation from the Psalms is put in the first person, and David (p.39) is writing as if he were speaking of himself, he is simply saying the words that eventually would be true of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus of Nazareth, "The fruit of his loins," is the one whom God would raise up to sit on the throne. Jesus of Nazareth was the One whose soul "was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption" (Acts 2:31). The Apostles Creed contains the expression, "He descended into hell." Here is one of the passages on which that statement is based.

Jesus was actually the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise. When God raised Him from the dead, it was not just a case of raising one of the human race. He raised the Messiah, the Son of God, who came in the form of man, in the body that He got from the seed of David.

"Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted . . . (Acts 2:33). That means being raised up from the dead and taken into heaven by the right hand of God. That expression, "the right hand of God," refers to the power of God. "And having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:33, 36). Peter has spent the major part of his sermon in proving that Jesus of Nazareth, in being raised from the dead, is publicly shown to be the Son of David. He is the one who fulfills the covenant with David to sit on the throne. The fact that He was raised from the dead identifies Him as the one who is going to be forever on the throne, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. That is what gives the Christian church its power and its amazing testimony.

God had given David a promise that one of his descendants would sit on the throne forever. If He were going to sit on the throne forever, He would have to get through death, because death would be the end of everyone else. Death ended the reign of David himself, but here is a descendant of David who was raised from the dead. This is the one who is actually going to inherit the promise that God made to David. This is Jesus of Nazareth whom God hath raised up and now He has become both Lord and Christ. He has received from the Father the Holy Spirit, and He has sent the Holy Spirit into the hearts of His people. This is the whole significance of Peter's sermon.

In the emphasis that Peter gave, he almost ignored the disciples, and he made no reference to the Christians personally. The great thing about the Christian church is not the individual Christian (p.40) members; the great thing about the Christian church is the Lord Jesus Christ. The great power of the Christian church is not in its members; the great power of the Christian church is in its head, the living Lord Jesus Christ. The significance of the Christian church is not so much its effect upon culture; the significance of the Christian church is seen in its effect upon the individual who becomes a Christian. That person is actually transformed by the power of God, changed from death unto life, by the same power that raised up Jesus Christ from the dead.

"Now when they heard this . . . (Acts 2:37). This was not just a mob that you would find on any street corner. These were devout men; they were religious people. "There were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men out of every nation under heaven." Now when these devout men, who believed in God

and came to Jerusalem to worship, when they heard that Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified there on Calvary was actually the Son of God, "they were pricked in their hearts." They were conscience-stricken. They "said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37) By this phrase, "men and brethren" we infer there was apparently no hostility.

Then Peter said unto them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).

In that statement there are three things of note. The first word is repent, change your mind about yourself and about Jesus Christ. Repent about your frame of mind and look around in another direction. Secondly, accept Jesus Christ as your atoning sacrifice. Come to God believing in Jesus Christ as your sacrifice. Put over the doorway of your heart the blood of the passover Lamb. Treat the Lord Jesus Christ the way Abraham treated that ram who was caught in the thicket. Abraham was taking Isaac to offer him in sacrifice to God. Just as he was about to slay his son, a voice called "Abraham"! Looking around, Abraham saw a ram caught in the thicket. He felt immediately that God had prepared Himself a sacrifice. So Abraham offered that ram in the place of his son, Isaac. There is one penalty for sin and that is death. When you come into the presence of God to confess your sins, you are saying to Almighty God that you deserve to be judged and put to death. We deserve it. To confess our sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, is to accept His sacrifice on Calvary's cross on our behalf. He is our sin offering before God.

Thirdly, you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. You do not have to do anything about it; it will be given to you. God will pour out His Spirit into your hearts. "For the promise is unto you and (p.41) to your children and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). If you feel disposed to turn to God, God is calling you. If you have the desire to draw nigh unto God, God is working in you. If you will respond to that call, God will receive you.

"And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation" (Acts 2:40). The whole world is not in favor of Jesus Christ. It is an untoward generation, and you have to save yourself from the world. Maybe no one else in your company of people will do it, but you will come to God to put your trust in Him, because God is calling you and you save yourself from this untoward generation. (p.42)

CHAPTER FOUR

(Acts 2:41 - 3:23)

There is a sense in which, when the Lord comes into my heart, it is a private affair -- it happens to me alone. His coming and my response are so intimate that it is the business of no one else! How secret is the individual response. And how precious is His response to my heart! Truly, only God knows when the heart is yielded to Him. In one sense, this is good. It is good for me to keep my affairs with God private, personal, secret with Him. But when this prompts me, as a Christian, to remain in isolation, to withdraw from others and live by myself, this tendency can do me harm.

The Bible says at the very beginning that it is not good for man to be alone. That is the nature of man. There is real benefit in sharing with other people. Isn't it true that sometimes when we are alone some difficulties grow and seem very, very big which are not really big at all? It is all in our imagination. We need fellowship with other people to get things in balance and in proper focus. When we have fellowship with other people, our fears are removed. Sometimes when you are alone, you can be frightened by things that are not really important. The fact is that you will feel better after you have been in fellowship with other people, and the truth is, you are better.

All of this is brought sharply into focus when we read the history of the early Christians. It was characteristic of the disciples to share together in their worship and in their work. Each one of them had his own personal experience with the Lord, but the Lord led them together. In Acts 2:1 we read, "They were all with one accord in one place." Many of these Christians had been called individually and were now learning the strength of fellowship and unity.

In the parable of the lost sheep, the shepherd had one hundred sheep. Ninety-nine were safe, but one was lost, and the shepherd went after the one lost sheep. There is something peculiarly touching about that, because each one of us is just one; and it is wonderful to (p.43) realize the Lord has us in mind as individuals. As we come to the Lord, we should come alone, but as we grow, we should grow together.

The clear teaching of the Lord is that Christians grow and serve when they are in fellowship with their Lord and with one another. It is not easy to grow when you are alone. "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 18:19). This is a marvelous promise. Why is it better for Tom and Dick to pray together than for Tom and Dick to pray separately? Well, if Tom and Dick get together and have to agree, there are some peculiarities that Tom has that annoy Dick, and Dick has some traits that are distasteful to Tom. But when the two get together and agree, you will find that their ideas and their convictions are gradually brought into agreement, as they seek guidance in the ways of the Lord. Actually, before the two can truly and sincerely grow, they have to discard the peculiarities.

James, in talking about these things, writes like this. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed" (James 5:16). It is a good thing to associate with other Christians. In fact, I cannot recall any instance in the Book of the Acts when the Holy Spirit came to any one who was in isolation. It is true that God dealt with Saul on the Damascus road when he was alone. Yet when the time came to bring Saul into the spiritual experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit, God used Ananias. He called Ananias to go over to the house where Saul was and to pray with him.

We think of Peter on the day of Pentecost, preaching that great sermon, but the Bible says, "Peter standing up *with the eleven*, lifted up his voice." He was not alone! There is strength in the fellowship of other people.

Look at this description of the early church. "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers And all that believed were together, and had all things common And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2:42, 44, 46). Strength and joy are promoted in fellowship. When you are living and walking with other Christians, there is definite growth.

A pastor was once trying to talk to a man about coming to church. This man said he was a Christian, and the pastor did not deny this. (p.44) But when the pastor urged the man to come to church, the chap said he could be just as good a Christian alone.

They were sitting in front of a fireplace which contained a coal fire. The minister took the tongs from beside the fireplace, reached in, and picked out one of the live coals. He carried it over to one side and laid it down on the stone slab, outside the actual fireplace itself. That single coal, fiery red when it was in the group of burning coals, turned gray and began to cool off. Soon it had lost its glow and its heating power. Then the minister went over with the tongs, picked up that single piece of coal which had become gray and cold, and put it back in the center with the live coals. Soon it was aglow, and began to throw off light and heat once more. In that way, the minister showed this man the importance of being with other Christians.

When I was just a young Christian, I was trying to understand this truth for myself, in my own experience. On the farm, sometimes, in the spring of the year, we had young chickens. As everyone knows, chicks huddle together to keep warm and to live through a bitter cold night. If for any reason the chickens get separated from each other, some will die of exposure to the cold, for no reason other than that they were off by themselves. But if all those chickens had clustered closer together, the heat given one to another would have kept them warm through the cold night.

In the early church, the Christians attended the public worship of God. They made it a point to continue steadfastly where the teaching and preaching was going on, and to stay in the fellowship of the apostles. If we take the early Christians of the Book of the Acts as our example, and want to have the kind of experience they had, one practical thing we should do is to meet with a group of Christian people and share in the public worship of God.

If any man could have stood alone, it would have been Paul the Apostle. We would say about him, without question, that he was a sturdy servant of the Lord. Yet when Paul was on his way to Rome, being taken there as a prisoner, certain Christians in Rome came out to meet him, "whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage" (Acts 28:15). He was the great Apostle Paul, but it warmed his heart and strengthened him when he saw these other Christian people. The writer of the Book of Hebrews stresses it this way: "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Hebrews 10:24, 25). (p.45)

Have you ever wondered what marked the early Christians? Can you picture them? Acts 2:41-47 gives us a wonderful description of the early church. Consider verse 41: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized." They listened to the preaching with eagerness. They were happy to hear the Gospel preached. They gladly received his word. They not only heard it, but they also received it. They accepted it as true and they were baptized. Their being baptized meant they made an open profession of their faith in the community. In other words, they joined the Christian group in front of everyone. It did not necessarily mean that they all had the same understanding and were all the same kind of people, but they all joined in the same common expression of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

"And the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). Many of

those people had been acquainted with the Gospel before. Many of them doubtless had heard and seen the Lord Jesus Christ in person. Some of them were from Jerusalem, and had heard and seen what had happened in that city. You should also note that not only was Peter preaching, but also about 120 others were teaching. We have not just one man's word, but the word of a whole group of people.

"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship" (Acts 2:42). Here is another characteristic of the early Christians. They continued "stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine." That means they attended to the preaching. That is what doctrine is -- preaching and teaching. These people studied more and more about the Gospel. They came to listen to the Bible being taught. They came day after day in fellowship, joining in public worship. They came together to praise God; they came together for Bible study; they came together to pray. These people did these things "stedfastly"; in other words, they made it their practice.

The expression "and in breaking of bread" refers to the Lord's Supper. In other words, they met for the purpose of remembering the Lord Jesus Christ, and that He had died for them, "This is my body, which is broken for you . . . This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (I Corinthians 11:24-26).

"And in prayers." This last phrase means that they engaged in systematic, positive praying individually and as a group. "And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done by the (p.46) apostles" (Acts 2:43). The translation at this point is not clear. When it says that "fear came upon every soul," it does not mean that all became afraid. The word "fear" in the Bible is associated with our word "awe," and can also be translated "reverence." They became deeply impressed with the things of God. They were reverent in the presence of God.

"And many wonders and signs were done by the apostles" (Acts 2:43). I wonder if the apostles would have been so effective in "many wonders and signs" if it had not been for the people who thought profoundly about God. If you have a congregation that is deeply impressed with the truth of God, and its members live daily in the presence of Almighty God, it is easier for God to work signs and wonders through you.

"And all that believed were together, and had all things common" (Acts 2:44). There was a brotherhood in that congregation. "And sold their possessions . . . and parted them to all men" (Acts 2:45). This does not mean they divided up everything and distributed it evenly among all. Notice the next clause: ". . . as every man had need." They took of their own and disposed of it, and gave according to the need.

"And they, continuing daily with one accord [with a united spirit, without any division among them] in the temple [engaged in the public worship of God] and breaking bread from house to house [they had private meetings which we might call cottage prayer meetings], did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people" (Acts 2:46,47). Even if the community does not believe what we believe, we should act in accordance with our faith, and be faithful and true in our testimony.

There is a sense of respect shown toward people who are sincere in their personal testimony of faith toward God. The people (i.e. the unsaved) appreciate it when those who profess to know Jesus Christ act like Christians, worship like Christians, talk like Christians, sing like Christians. There is a new light in the eyes, a new tone in the voice, and a new atmosphere in the home, and the outside world is still quick to recognize this.

"And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). "Such as should be saved" would be better translated as "such as were being saved." The effect these early Christians had

upon others caused more and more people to join them. And surely such is the real purpose of our Christian witness in word and in life! (p.47)

We turn now to the consideration of a miracle in which we see the continuity of Christ's power, as He begins to work through the young church, which is His Body.

Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up; and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength, And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God (Acts 3:1-8).

This is a remarkable story. Here is the church, in Peter and John, meeting the world in this lame man. The church had something for him.

"Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer . . ." (v. 1). In those few simple words, we have a description of what should be a Christian life. Peter and John were together. It is wonderful to know God by yourself. It is wonderful to know that, no matter what the circumstances are and how isolated you may be, you are never alone. However, it is normal that we should have fellowship with other Christian people, for we need friends in the Lord. Peter and John went up together, for the same purpose, into the temple.

The temple was the place of Jewish worship. The Jewish people, as a whole, did not believe what Peter and John believed. Peter and John knew more than the other people in the temple. Yet they went into the temple where even the priests did not know what Peter and John knew. Why did they go to the temple? They went because it was the place of public worship, and to worship God in public was to honor God. Maybe you know, by the grace of God, some things that your preacher does not know. You may know certain things that your Sunday school teacher does not know. However, you ought to go to church! You ought to be in Sunday school!

Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer. They did not go there to teach or to change anyone, or to change any circumstances. Their purpose was not to criticize. (p.48) They went there to worship God. How true it is when people say they do not go to church to worship the preacher. They go to church to worship God. Quite so! If your preacher is a faithful man of God and understands the Scripture, thank the Lord! If your preacher does not know those things, pray for him. Don't go to church because of the preacher. Don't go to church because of the people. Go to church because of the Lord!

"Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour [three o'clock in the afternoon]. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms."

One of the most characteristic things about human beings is that they are handicapped. Human beings are likely to feel their personal limitations, shortcomings and weaknesses. So it was with this man, "lame from his mother's womb." He was born crippled, as are many of us. Many of us have weaknesses and personality liabilities. Actually we are not the kind of people we wish we were. We carry inherited traits.

Why was this man carried and laid daily at the gate of the temple? He needed help. People are more charitable when they are coming to God than at any other time. As part of their religious life, the Jewish people would give to the poor. When anyone in the city of Jerusalem needed help, he would go to the place of worship to ask for it, and there is something very fitting about that. A person who is going into the temple is going to ask for help. When I go to church to worship God, I am actually there because I need help. It is somewhat easy for me, since I go to the church for help, to feel inwardly moved to help someone else.

This lame man saw Peter and John about to go into the temple. He had no idea who Peter and John were. He did not know anything about their personal faith or about their personal obedience to the Lord. The only thing he knew was that they were about to go into the temple, and he asked for help. "And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us" (v. 4). Peter and John did not try to avoid helping this man. They listened to what he had to say. "And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them" (Acts 3:5). He expected to receive something from them because they were going into the temple to worship. You and I should conduct ourselves in such a way that people in the community would get the idea that they could get help from us. Perhaps we can (p.49) give them more help than we know -- spiritual help of a kind about which they know nothing.

"Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee" (Acts 3:6). When it comes to supplying the physical needs of the world we just do not have enough money. God has never endowed the church with enough money to meet all the physical needs of the world. The cattle on a thousand hills belong to God. All the silver and gold are His. If He had wished, He could have seen to it that His people had the dispensing of all His wealth. But He did not.

"But such as I have I give to thee." Peter gave this man something. What did Peter actually give? Peter applied his faith on behalf of this man. Peter undertook to ask God to bless this man and to help him. "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." This is Peter's faith being exercised. Note that there is no evidence of faith on the part of the cripple.

"He took him by the right hand, and lifted him up." Notice Peter did that before anything happened to the man, and that is where obedience comes in. Peter was once told by the Lord to go and let his nets down for a draft of fish. Peter told the Lord that he had fished all night and had not caught anything. Nevertheless, at His word, Peter let down the net.

Remember how it was with Abraham? God told Abraham he would have a son when Abraham was 100 years old. Abraham "considered not his own body, now [as good as] dead" (Romans 4:19), but he considered God and gave God the glory, believing that what God had promised He was able also to perform.

God wanted Noah to build an ark before it rained. Noah built that ark on dry ground expecting that what God had said would happen would come true, and it did.

"He took him by the right hand and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength, And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God" (Acts 3:7, 8). You can, with the eyes of your imagination, see him getting more and more excited, more and more aroused, more and more thrilled, because of what had happened.

Has anyone in your family, or among your friends, recently become a Christian? There is something wonderfully inspiring about seeing the grace of God working in a person's life, changing them from the inside out and filling them with joy. It is inspiring to see such people living entirely different lives and having entirely different experiences. The church actually lives on this sort of thing. (p.50)

"And all the people saw him walking and praising God: And they knew that it was he which sat for

alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him" (Acts 3:9, 10). These people had gone to the temple to go through the routine of religious exercises. Everyone knew the lame man. He had been put outside the temple day after day throughout the years. Though he had been lame all his lifetime, suddenly, they saw this man walking. His legs had strength. He was running, walking, leaping and praising God. All the people were filled with wonder and amazement. This is the strength of Christian testimony. When a person becomes a Christian, it is an open event for everyone to see.

If you are wondering about being an out-and-out Christian, let me tell you something. Being an out-and-out Christian is normal. There are secret Christians, people who really do believe in the Lord but don't openly say so. That is a good deal like a secret marriage. A secret marriage can be real, but it misses a great deal. The normal thing for a bride is to show off her wedding ring. If people act that way normally about ordinary things in this world, you can be sure it will happen spiritually when a person becomes a Christian. In any church when there is a real conversion, everyone knows it. What a wonderful thing it is! The testimony of a newborn soul carries great weight.

"And they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him" (Acts 3:10). These people were not yet wondering about the Lord. They were not yet amazed at the power of God, because they did not realize what this was all about. But they did see the change in this man. There was no doubt about that.

"And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering" (Acts 3:11). Have you ever stopped to really analyze why unbelievers do not come to church? People will always turn out to see a fire. Any time a fire breaks out in any community the streets are filled with people. If they come to see a fire in the middle of the night, they will come to see a fire in a church! They will come to church if wonderful things are happening there.

These people were wondering. Notice how many times that word "wonder" is used. These people were amazed.

"And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people" (Acts 3:12). These people did not know what this was all about. All they knew was that they saw a change in this man. Peter told the people: (p.51)

Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? Or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of Life; whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all (Acts 3:12-16).

This would have been a wonderful time for Peter to build up his reputation. He could have strutted around with pride, and bragged about himself; but he didn't. When the people came looking at Peter he said, "What are you giving me the credit for? And why are you so surprised to see this thing happen? This is God. What you have seen done to this lame man was done by the living Lord Jesus Christ." What would happen if, in our church, we could bear that testimony? Peter did not hesitate to say that this healing of the lame man was the wonderful work of the Lord!

"And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it." This old English word "wot" means "know." In other words, "And now, brethren, I *know* that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your

rulers. But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled" (Acts 3:17, 18). Peter is telling them that what God had promised through all the prophets had been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. All those promises have been validated.

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you" (Acts 3:19, 20).

"Repent" is to be conscious of your own unfitness. When Peter says "repent" he is not telling them they should be sorry for what they have done. Peter is not telling them that they had better change their ways. He is saying that they should judge themselves. They should take a good look at themselves and acknowledge their own inward unfitness and sin. In other words, the step they should take is to admit that they were not what they ought to be, and that they should be converted.

We had better look at the word "converted" as Peter used that (p.52) word. He meant they should change their minds. When he says "be converted," he actually means "be changed." For example, if you have been going north, turn around and go south. If you have been going east, turn around and go west. If you have been walking away from God, turn around and walk toward God. If you have been thinking the thoughts of men, leaving God out of all your thoughts, turn around and think of God.

"Be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." It is our sins that make all the trouble between us and God. When God does move into our hearts and bless us, one of the first things that happens is the forgiveness of sin, but this forgiveness of sin follows two things. First, you judge yourself as unfit, and second, you turn away from personal, selfish, natural things to look into the face of God. Then your sins will be blotted out, "when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord, and he shall send Jesus Christ which before was preached unto you." This is a way of saying that the Lord Jesus Christ will actually become operative in your life. God will Himself move over into your consciousness with all the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ. God has given His Holy Spirit to help us. The Holy Spirit will take the things of Christ and show them unto us.

"Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:21). This Lord Jesus Christ who lived as Jesus of Nazareth, was crucified and buried. He rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sits now at the right hand of God where He is going to stay until the time when God is going to make everything right by sending Him back to this world in power and great glory.

"For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you" (Acts 3:22). Moses had predicted the coming of a prophet like himself, who would tell them the things of God. This prophet was the Lord Jesus Christ.

"And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people" (Acts 3:23). That is how important it is. When God sent the Lord Jesus Christ into this world, it was not an optional matter with man, as to whether or not be wanted to listen. When God sent the Lord Jesus Christ, that was His Word. He is a savor of life unto life in them that believe and a savor of death unto death in them that do not believe. God has given the Lord Jesus Christ "a name (p.53) which is above every name" and He has decreed that "every knee should bow . . . And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11).

Every human being will some day face and acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Christ of God. There is no question about it. Any soul that will not hear Him shall be destroyed because of sin. The condemnation is already on him. For instance, if a man were out in a river drowning, and he refused

any help, he would drown. It is not because someone got mad and pushed him into the water, for he was already drowning in the water, because he refused help. "Every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed." All men are under condemnation. If they do not listen to that prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ, they will be lost. (p.54)

CHAPTER FIVE

(Acts 3:24- 5:42)

"And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Acts 4:1, 2).

The priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees were the leading people of the Jews. The priests were the leaders in religious thought, similar to our ministers today. The captain of the temple was in charge of the temple. He was the manager of the temple. The Sadducees were the religious party in power at that time. The Sadducees claimed to worship God, but they did not believe in spirits, in the reality of heaven, in life after death, or in the resurrection.

We have people today who do not believe in miracles. Some people do not believe that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, that He was raised from the dead, that He is living now, or that He is coming again. Some of us wonder what in the world they do believe. Yet these people think they really believe in God, and that they have merely discarded some things they consider to be unimportant.

The Sadducees were like that. And when the Jewish leaders elected their high priests, one time they would choose a Pharisee, and another time it would be a Sadducee. So now, the Sadducees were in charge. All these leaders of the Jews came upon Peter and John as they were speaking to the people.

"Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Acts 4:2). It bothered these leaders that these disciples were speaking on their own, and teaching things that the leaders had not authorized. They preached the resurrection of the dead. They told these people that this world is not our final abode, and that the life they were living was not the end. They told them that after they had lived this life, they would be (p.55) raised from the dead, and live again. On what grounds did they argue this? They said, "Just as Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead, so you'll be raised from the dead." Their testimony was that they had actually seen Jesus, after His resurrection from the dead.

Jesus is alive! There is another world beyond this one. You are living here in the flesh where you hear, see, taste, touch and smell the things of this world. There is another world beyond the senses. That is what was taught to the early church. Of course, many people were impressed by this teaching. Therefore, the leaders, the priests, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees were grieved that these disciples were taking it on themselves to influence the minds of the people.

"And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day, for it was now eventide" (Acts 4:3). This simply means that they arrested them and put them in jail until the next day.

"Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand" (Acts 4:4). "Howbeit" means in spite of the opposition, in spite of the arrest, in spite of being put in jail. All this was interruption, it was frustrating and it was wrong; it was persecution, but in spite of that, "Howbeit, many of them which heard the word believed and the number of the men was about five thousand." Just because you run into opposition, don't think that you are on the wrong road. You may be doing exactly what you ought to be doing. It may be you are on the right road when this trouble comes. If you are testifying to the things of the Lord, you are bringing men face to face with the idea they are going to meet God.

Some people don't want to think about that. It bothers them, and they will oppose you, they will cause you trouble. You should not be discouraged by that. Think about the early church and about the

disciples. Wouldn't it have been too bad if they had been discouraged? However, the disciples were not discouraged.

"And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem" (Acts 4:5, 6). All of these were there in court to try the apostles for their public ministry. The rulers were the rulers of the temple. The elders were the proper counselors and advisors. The scribes were the scholars, the teachers, the interpreters of the Bible. Annas, the high priest, had been elected to this position and was the president of the group. Caiaphas was a priest who had previously been the high priest. John and Alexander were evidently prominent men who (p.56) were associated with them. These were the leading men in the community, "and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest were gathered together at Jerusalem." This means the family of the high priest was also there.

"And when they had set them in the midst" (Acts 4:7). They brought the disciples into the court. We could say they called them up to the bar and accused them of having created a disturbance.

"They asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" (Acts 4:7). They are referring to the healing of the man who had been lame from his birth, the one who had lain outside the temple at the Beautiful gate, asking for an alms. Peter and John came by and were used to heal him. Who gave them the authority to do this? That's what the Jewish leaders were asking these disciples, and when they used the word *power* they meant not so much by what inward ability as much as by what outward authorization. Who gave them the right to do this kind of thing? Remember in Scripture where it says, ". . . as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God" (John 1:12). The Greek brings out the fact that it gave them the right and the privilege of becoming the children of God, and that is the idea here. Who authorized them to do this? Who gave them this authority?

"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole" (Acts 4:8-10). What an opportunity those angry authorities gave to Peter and John. We could consider this in accordance with Psalm 76:10, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee!"

Notice what Peter did *not* say. He did not give an explanation, from a human point of view, as to how the miracle had happened. He did not explain from a physiological point of view the changes that took place in the body of the once lame man. There was no explanation of the part that Peter and John had in this whole business. There was no discussion or description of how close they lived to the Lord, and how strong they were in faith. "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth . . ." If he had just said "Christ" one would think he might have been talking about an idea, a theological thought, but he said "Jesus Christ of Nazareth." Nazareth was where Jesus grew up, (p.57) that was where He carried on His public ministry. This is the Man who had lived and moved among them, "whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead."

If you want to talk to people and try to bring to them something of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, you haven't started talking until you bring in the fact that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. God is real! God can raise the dead! There would be much power and much meaning brought into everything we do in church work, if we would center our teaching right here. We are Christians because Jesus Christ rose from the dead! He is alive now! He is in the presence of God, and it is He in whom we put our trust.

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). With these words the Apostle Peter ended his defense when he was called into court for preaching in public.

The word "saved" is extremely important. One of the first things this word meant to me was that I would not be finally destroyed. It meant that I was not going to hell. Later on, as I understood more about being "Saved," I knew that I would be forgiven the guilt of my sin. I would be a forgiven sinner. Still later, I found out that through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, dying for me and being raised from the dead, that I could be delivered from the bondage of sin. I could one day expect a change to take place in me similar to the change that took place in the body of the Lord Jesus Christ when He had been crucified. The power of God raised Him from the dead, and He was made alive. It will happen to me just that way also. So, when we speak about "being saved," we are thinking of being changed from the flesh into the spirit; from that which is natural into that which is spiritual. We will be changed from the kind of person who is thinking largely of this world, into the kind of person who is thinking of the world to come.

"Neither is there salvation in any other." In other words, God's great work of redeeming and delivering will not be done in any other name than the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no other way of getting this done. This was Peter's testimony.

"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John . . ." (Acts 4:13). These two men were unafraid. They stood up in the prisoner's dock, and faced their judges. "And [the Jewish leaders] perceived they were unlearned and ignorant men." They saw that these men were unlearned, they had not been to a university, they were not educated. When it says that they were ignorant, this means they were not well-read men. They were not sophisticated in the form (p.58) of intellectual language. They spoke in a simple way. Men they saw that these men were uneducated and spoke in the language of the common man, "they marvelled." It is always astonishing to hear anyone talking, about his spiritual experiences in everyday language. Sometimes when we hear a man pray who uses formal religious words, which can be very proper and good, it is more or less what we expect. If, however, someone prays in everyday language, it has added meaning and impact.

"They marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). They recognized that these disciples had been with Jesus. This was the source of their confidence. Peter and John were teaching that the Lord Jesus Christ is alive. The people in the court room watched these men facing these sophisticated scholars and giving straightforward answers boldly. I am inclined to think that they were impressed by the fact that those men were speaking as eye witnesses. They had been with Jesus since His resurrection; therefore, their testimony was sincere. There was certainty in the way they talked.

"And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it" (Acts 4:14). This is a wonderful testimony. This was the evidence that the Lord Jesus Christ had healed this lame man.

Do you, by any chance, have some person in your community who has actually been changed by the Gospel? Perhaps you have known someone who has been addicted to drink, or who has led a careless and ungodly life, but who was transformed. Perhaps someone in your family has had a real change of heart. Such people can give a tremendous boost to the preaching of the Gospel. We can talk endlessly about the Gospel and about the Lord Jesus Christ. It is hard to make it seem real unless we can refer to one person as an example of "before-and-after": this is what he was like before, and this is what he is like now. When someone who had been opposed to the Gospel, who had paid no attention to it and just

laughed at the things of God, has been changed into a godly, believing, humble and meek person by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, this is a powerful testimony.

"But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves" (Acts 4:15). The rulers, the chief priests and the other Jewish leaders who had brought these men into court commanded that Peter and John go out of the room, so they could confer among themselves, "saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and (p.59) we cannot deny it" (Acts 4:16). This shows the sturdy strength of the Christian testimony. Nothing in the world has such power and argument as a changed life. Therefore, these men couldn't deny the effectiveness of their testimony. "But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name" (Acts:4:17). The word *straitly* means "strictly" or "sternly." In other words, "Let's warn them that they speak henceforth to no man in this name." That's rather strange, isn't it? It shows how far prejudice can go.

Here is a church that, with its testimony and its ministry, is a means of blessing to the people in a community. People go there and are helped. Yet such can be the narrowness of peoples minds and the short-sightedness of their thinking that they can actually want that church to be shut up. They do not want that church in the community, even though people are being blessed. Isn't that a strange thing?

"And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18). Every time I read this, I am astonished. The only reason I am so struck by it, I suppose, is because I have seen this happen in my own lifetime. I have known men who were actually kept out of certain pulpits because they were so much more effective in preaching than the present pastor. "But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye" (Acts 4:19). This is a polite way of saying, "We are not doing it because you asked us to. We were led of God to start this. We are going to go on serving God whether you like it or not." "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). There Peter gave the answer that will always be given at any time by anyone who is ministering the Gospel and doing the work of the Lord.

"So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done" (Acts 4:21). The leaders wanted to stop Peter and John from preaching, but the people appreciated it. The leaders could not find any way to punish Peter and John, because of the people.

"And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that [when the church heard that they had commanded them not to preach], they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is." They had been told not (p.60) to tell anyone about the Gospel, but they couldn't keep quiet. So they got together in prayer. "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings [You can see what they are threatening to do to us]: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word" (Acts 4:22-29). Isn't that amazing? They didn't say, with reference to these people who were opposing them, "if any man lifts up his hand to strike us, may he be paralyzed." They said, "[See what we are threatened with; give us strength to go ahead], By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus" (Acts 4:30). In other words, they prayed, "O Lord, give us power. Help us to go on with our work." Whenever we run into any opposition, let's ask the Lord to give us grace. Ask for grace but don't stop praying, and don't stop working!

These early Christians asked God to endorse their testimony with works of power, because, of course, those works of power would be effective in impressing other people.

"And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together" (Acts 4:31). We are reminded again of Pentecost. "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness." That's what they had asked for, "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common" (Acts 4:32).

These people were together in one real brotherhood. Sometimes people will say that the early church was communistic. If you look closely at this, you will not see that; this was Christian, not communistic. It says, "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." They were united in heart and mind. "Neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own." That's a Christian's attitude about his possessions. They were not saying that the things they had belonged to the other fellow. When you read, "they had all things common," it means they accepted everything they had as from the Lord. They believed that God gave them all they had. In other words, some of it is in John Smith's hands, some of it is in Tom Brown's hands, some of it is in Bill Jones' hands, but it does not really belong to them. It belongs to God and in that sense it is for everyone.

They were united in a common cause, a unity of purpose. Their hearts were united in danger and united in service. So, of course, they were united as one in their fellowship together. "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:33). The whole (p.61) church, of one heart, of one mind, presented the Gospel to the world outside.

"Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need" (Acts 4:34, 35). This does not imply that they liquidated all their property. But those who possessed lands or houses sold them, brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: "and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." Distribution was not made to every man equally. Distribution was not made to every man as though they all had an equal share. This isn't a matter of pooling their resources and giving everyone his proportionate share. This is a matter of all working together for whatever was needed in the community, and every man that needed anything was given what he needed.

"And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation) . . . having land, sold it and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:36, 37). This does not necessarily mean that Barnabas sold all the land that he owned, but that he had a certain piece of property, which he sold, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. In the fellowship of the church, the hearts and mind of the church were united in brotherly interest and concern for each other. When anyone had need, they all had interest in his need. If anyone had any extra property, he would sell it to help in this need. He did not have to sell anything if he did not want to. All this was done through the church. This was not a case that Tom Jones sold his property to give Bill Henry some of it. Tom Jones sold his property, brought the money in to the elders, and they distributed it. All this was done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because the church was threatened from the outside, it was drawn closer together in a brotherhood in the Lord. They gave an effective witness to the world outside. Inside, the church drew closer together in brotherly love.

A man sins when he does that which is wrong in the sight of God. Another word in our language which means much the same as the word *sin* is the word *crime*. Generally speaking, when I use the word *crime*, I mean that a man has acted in some way that is harmful to other men. I use the word *sin* when a man acts in some way that is displeasing or contrary to God. Generally speaking, people think that there should not be any sin in a church. Perhaps (p.62) that is a tribute to the presence of God in a church, and if God is there, indeed there should not be any sin. Perhaps, also, the idea is that if people belong to a church, they are among those who have put their trust in God and who obey God. If they obey God, they are certainly not going to be doing wrong. Yet we do find sin in churches.

What should a church do about it? If there are one hundred people in the church and one does wrong, what can any of the other ninety-nine do? That is something we learn when we look in the fifth chapter of the Book of Acts. We are going to see how the early church dealt with sin in the church.

"But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession [they sold a piece of property], And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 5:1, 2). During the time of the early church, whenever there was a need in the congregation, any man who had property would sell this property and bring in the money and divide it among the people. Barnabas was one man who had done this, as we read in Acts 4. Perhaps Ananias and Sapphira his wife, noticed how the people felt about Barnabas. Perhaps they envied Barnabas his good name. Maybe they were jealous of his popularity. So, when they sold their piece of property, they brought in the money, but they did not bring all of it. They kept back part of the price.

When it says, "his wife also being privy to it," this means that he and his wife did this in collusion. They wanted to give the impression that they were giving the entire price to the church. This, of course, was not true, because they kept part of the money.

"But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God" (Acts 5:3, 4). Notice carefully how Peter dealt with this. Peter did not refer to anything like covetousness. He did not refer to greed or the love of money. As a matter of fact, he did not refer to the fact that Ananias kept the money. He merely says, "Whiles it remained, was it not thine own?" Ananias could have kept all the money. "After it was sold, was it not in thine power?" He had the money in his pocket and could have left it there. That does not mean that God would not be interested in what he was doing with his money, but it means that Peter would not have raised a question about it. When Peter says, "Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart?" (p.63) it was the lie to which Peter drew attention. He drew attention to the dishonesty, the hypocrisy.

Actually, Ananias and Sapphira were not required to sell. They could if they wanted to. Barnabas and others did so, but they did not have to. God wanted them to take care of the poor, that is true. However, the church had not made any rule about that. This is important for us to keep in mind. This shows that the early church was not a group of people who felt that everyone owned everything. They did not believe in group ownership, but in individual ownership. This land in question belonged to Ananias and Sapphira. It was not a matter of authoritative control. Peter was not telling them that they had to give and that they had disobeyed him. However, there was a need. There were poor people and they could give if they wanted to. The issue here is that they lied. They brought in the money and pretended it was the whole amount received from the sale of the land. This is very serious.

The first sin in the church which was brought to the surface and condemned by the church, through Peter, was this sin of hypocrisy. It is difficult to walk into a church in complete honesty of heart. Have

you ever heard the expression of putting on your Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes? Do you go to church with a pious attitude when you are not really pious? Do you try to act spiritually when you are not a spiritual person? The church should be a place where we will be honest, realistically honest.

"But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?" Anyone who comes into church and pretends to be something that he is not, is doing that in the presence of the Holy Spirit of God. When anyone acts in such a way as to deceive the church, he is not lying unto man, he is lying unto God.

"And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things" (Acts 5:5). You might think that Peter put him to death. However, there is no evidence that Peter had anything to do with it. All that Peter did was to discuss the actual meaning of the conduct of Ananias. He asked Ananias to admit and to recognize what he had done and then he asked him point blank why he did it. That is all. The death of Ananias was not on Peter's initiative. We read, "he gave up the ghost." What happened to him came from God. This had an effect upon everyone. "Great fear came on all them that heard these things."

Remember that Peter did not blame Ananias for keeping the money. Peter said he could have kept all of the money if he had wanted to. Then, although Ananias would have been responsible to God for what he did with his money, he would not have been (p.64) responsible to the church. But when he pretended something that was not true, then he lied against the Holy Spirit. Therefore, his lie was of such a nature that it would hurt the church as a whole. The church is a fellowship of people who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. They are drawn to the Lord Jesus Christ in their faith, and they are to have communion with Him. When you are dealing solely with the Lord Jesus Christ, you do not need to worry about deceiving anyone. You cannot deceive the Lord! He can see right through you. But in a fellowship of believers you are not only drawn to the Lord, you are also drawn to each other. The church is a communion of believers who gather together with mutual relationship. In the church there is a temptation for us to try to appear something more than we are. You can call it plain hypocrisy.

"And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out and buried him" (Acts 5:6). That is the way they took care of dead bodies. They wrapped them in cloth and carried them out and buried them. They did not bury them in the ground, as we do in our day, but they placed them in a cave, like a mausoleum. "And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?" (Acts 5:7-9). This is the third time that Peter has referred to this sin. Each time he points out that the sin was against God, not against man. In the third verse, he said to Ananias, "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" In the fourth verse, "Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." And now in the ninth verse, "How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?"

In other words, this dishonest action was actually a sin against God. It is God who is forming and shaping the church. God is bringing believers together. In this fellowship, honesty, sincerity and reality is absolutely essential. Nothing will ruin a fellowship as much as dishonesty. Nothing will chill a communion of people as much as when someone with them is full of pretense.

"And Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband" (Acts 5:9, 10). Once again, this does not say that Peter took her life. Peter only confronted her with the truth. He knew what had happened to her

husband, (p.65) and predicted what was going to happen to her. "Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out."

What did the early church do about sin? What did Peter do about sin? He pointed out that the sin which they thought they committed against the church, was really committed against God Himself. "And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things" (Acts 5:11). Remember again that the word "fear" refers to "awe" or "reverence." The people were profoundly affected. What does that mean, as far as we are concerned? Today the church will have to acknowledge the truth within itself. The church will have to condemn sin among its members.

The Holy Spirit of God cannot move in a church where people put up with pretense. The church should openly oppose hypocrisy in any form or shape regardless of who it is, rich or poor. "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people" (Acts 5:12). It made the church effective and powerful among other people. And it would do that with us.

"(And they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women)" (Acts 5:12-14). Apparently these Christians gathered together in a certain section of the temple compound, called Solomon's porch. No one else dared to join them, because they were so sincere. The hypocrites were scared off, so to speak. "But the people magnified them." The people in the community appreciated the way the church had honestly admitted that there was sin in its membership. "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." You would think that people might be discouraged by the fact that sin was exposed. Actually, it brings people to the church, because there is an honesty about it.

"Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them" (Acts 5:15). There was public excitement. No doubt, these people were greatly moved. The early church actually affected the community as a whole. Peter, the representative of the early church, became an important man. Everyone had in mind that they would benefit if they could get his favor. "There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one" (Acts 5:16). This was the way the public responded to the (p.66) great power of the church. It was the result of honesty, sincerity, integrity and the repudiation of hypocrisy on the part of the church.

"Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison" (Acts 5:17, 18). Perhaps you don't see how anyone could object to something that is done on behalf of other people. But these things do happen, and they happen in our churches today. You will find that other churches may resent any church that has become active and effectual. This is what happened to the early church. "The high priest and all they that were with him were filled with indignation." No one had actually hurt them, but they resented all this excitement. "And laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison." They arrested them and put them in jail. They treated them like common criminals. What was it that they were doing that was so wrong? They evidently were accused of disturbing the peace. So they were put in the common prison.

"But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life" (Acts 5:19, 20). We do not know what the angel looked like. We do not know whether he came in the form of man or not. This was a miraculous release from the limitation that had been imposed upon them. They had been put in prison, but

were released and told to "Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life." Notice that their release was not for personal benefit. They were not told to slip away and hide and try not to get caught again. They were not told to change the things they were saying, so the people would not take offense. Their release was brought about to further the Gospel. "Go, stand and speak."

"And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought" (Acts 5:21). The disciples were in the temple teaching when the high priests thought they were in jail. "But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow" (Acts 5:22-24). This was spectacular (p.67) news. Everyone in the community would want to know about this. "Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence; for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned" (Acts 5:25, 26). This was an exciting event. Peter and John had been opposed before when they had healed the lame man. Now they were being opposed again, because their message was so popular.

When the leaders opposed the apostles and threw them in prison, they were ignoring the judgment of the common people. The common people wanted the disciples to preach. So the leaders "brought them without violence; for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? And, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us" (Acts 5:27, 28). They felt that the early Christians were making the religious leaders responsible for the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree, Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him. When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them" (Acts 5:29-33).

Did you notice that Peter made no defense of himself? He did not refer to his own conduct or his own record. He did not say that he had always done the right thing and that he had always been a good man. He made no complaint about how he had been treated. Peter spoke only about the Lord! He took this opportunity to preach the Gospel. He spoke of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He spoke of the call to repentance, and of the promise of remission for sin.

Peter said, "Everything we have done, we have done in the name of Jesus Christ, the very one that you crucified." And so the council decided they would just have to kill these people, so that the group movement as a whole would be checked. "When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them." They began to take advice as to how they might kill them.

Then we read about the advice given by a man named Gamaliel, a Pharisee. He was "a doctor of the law," meaning he was a specialist, (p.68) a scholar. As a lawyer, he was an exceptionally well-read and well-informed man, "had in reputation among all the people." He "commanded to put the apostles forth a little space" (Acts 5:34). They took them out of the room. Then Gamaliel talked to these people. He said they should be careful what they were going to do. "Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye

intend to do as touching these men" (Acts 5:35). They had had other men create disturbances. He cited several illustrations. He spoke of Theudas, "boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed" (Acts 5:36, 37). In other words, they had had trouble-makers before.

"And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it: lest haply ye be found even to fight against God" (Acts 5:38, 39).

This is commonly called "Gamaliel's Advice." He said, "it is risky to do anything against them. If they are only human, what they are talking about will come to nothing. If it should turn out that they are talking for God, you would be opposing God." "And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go" (Acts 5:40). The result of it was that the apostles were spared. They were beaten and they were commanded not to preach -- but they were allowed to go! And so they departed.

"And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they cease not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:41, 42). Isn't that an amazing thing? One of these two men was Peter. Do you remember the time Peter denied His Lord? When the young damsel, in front of the soldiers accused Peter, "You belong to Jesus of Nazareth," Peter said he didn't. This same Peter, a few weeks later, stands up in front of the council and takes his whipping.

The phrase, "daily in the temple," means public worship, going to church. "In every house" means visitation. Going from home to home, they ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus Christ. You are teaching Jesus Christ when you tell the story of the Gospel. He died for the sins of the man to whom you are talking. And, (p.69) through Him, men can be saved. To inform and to explain is the equivalent of teaching. Preaching is to urge and exhort. Preaching is when you urge people to turn to God through Jesus Christ and when you tell people that the time has come for them to turn to God and to be received of Him. So the early church taught, talked and preached about Jesus Christ. (p.70)

CHAPTER SIX

(Acts 6:1 - 8:4)

The first seven verses of the sixth chapter of the Book of the Acts brings us to the account of the first organization in the church. There were as many as five thousand Christians in Jerusalem, living together as brethren. No man counted anything he had as his own. If anyone had need, the man that had the means gave it to the man who did not. But among these good people, discontent arose. These were not unkind people, and they did not dislike one another, but there arose tension and discontent among them, despite the fact that they were members of the Body of Christ.

"And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration" (Acts 6:1). "The daily ministration" means the distribution of food. They shared the food, and the Hebrews gave out the supplies. "Widow" does not necessarily refer to women whose husbands were dead, although it would include those. It would also include anyone who was dependent. The word "widow" means someone without visible support, and could refer either to a man or a woman, whose ordinary source of supply had been cut off. These "widows" were dependent on the other Christians.

"There arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews." They were all Jews, but Grecian Jews murmured against Hebrew Jews. The Hebrews were the Jews who lived in Jerusalem, and who spoke Hebrew. The Grecian Jews lived out in the Roman Empire, and had learned Greek, so they were Greek-speaking Jews. These people were not only all Jews, they were all Christians. The word "murmuring," as used in the Bible, can mean "complaining."

They began to "fuss" with each other, they began to quarrel and complain. The Greek Jews complained against the Hebrew Jews. Why? Greek-speaking Jews came from outside the city of Jerusalem, and those who were Aramaic- or Hebrew-speaking Jews, were from inside the city of Jerusalem. The people from the outside were (p.71) at odds with those on the inside. Those who came from the "outside," foreigners, so to speak, felt that their needy people were neglected in the daily ministration.

By way of explanation, in your own congregation, don't you have some families whom everyone has known for a long time? Perhaps their fathers and grandfathers were members of the church. You know Uncle Bill, Aunt Mary, Cousin Jane -- they are poor and needy and you know perfectly well that they must have help. So you help them. However, here is Mrs. Smith from some distance, and Mrs. Brown, who may be of another nationality, whose language is different. These people have need, but no one knows them very well. Without intentional neglect, it could happen that they would not be taken care of as well as the families known to you for years. The "foreigners" would begin to notice this, for when people are poor, and when they feel strange, they are very sensitive.

Now someone might say their reactions were not very Christ-like. I would answer, "Don't talk like that!" These were human beings in need, there in Jerusalem, but they were genuinely sincere. They began to murmur, they complained quietly among themselves, because they felt they were strangers in the community. They noticed that when the food was distributed among the poor, they did not get their fair share, and such a thing as this can disturb a Church.

"Then the twelve [referring to the apostles, who were the leaders] called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables" (Acts 6:2). In other words, it did not make sense for them to leave the Word of God. This would take too much of their time. They would be taken away from the spiritual work to which they were called, if they were

now going to have to pay attention to how the food was distributed. So they laid down a basic principle in the management of the distribution of the food. First, they said that the ministry of the Word of God, the actual preaching, teaching and praying, should come first. It should have priority over practical management. Then, they said, "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:3, 4). This is a profoundly important solution of their problem, and establishes an abiding principle.

The early Christians were told to pick out seven men. "Look ye out seven men of honest report" means that they should hold an election. They were to select seven men in whom they had confidence. "Honest report" means men who are personally conscious (p.72) of the presence of God in their lives. These men had personal dealings with the Lord Jesus Christ. "Wisdom" means to have good, common sense. Such men as this were to be appointed for the purpose of distributing the food among the poor. The apostles were to give themselves "continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." This was the solution.

No one who is active in church would have any question of the wisdom of this solution. Can you see that this criticism could have been thought of as a criticism of the apostles? These twelve apostles were the leaders of a large congregation of five thousand people. This large congregation shared with the poor and this took considerable administrative work. The twelve apostles were technically responsible for this work. Criticism, or complaints arose, about how this was done. Can you see how different it would have been if Peter had taken personal offense? Suppose Peter had answered, "How dare you accuse us? Do you think we are deceitful about this thing? Do you think we are not honest? Do you think we are not thoughtful of everyone?"

Suppose they had been offended, how vastly different the story would be. However, not only is there no alibi, there is also no contradiction. They did not say it was not so. I am not at all sure that these Grecians were neglected. But that is not important. Those Grecian-speaking Jews, who were from outside Jerusalem, felt that there was discrimination. Their feeling they had been neglected was a real feeling. Peter did not bother to investigate. He didn't appoint a committee to find out whether the charges were true. He did not alibi, nor take any defense. Actually, this grievance might have been caused by some misunderstanding.

But the people from the outside had a real grievance. And that is where the apostles said, "Look ye out among you seven men of good report." Can you see how different it would have been if Peter had said, "Well, I see that you don't have any confidence in the way in which we are doing this, and we will have to arrange for that"? Then suppose he had turned to James, Matthew and Judas and said, "You take this over and handle it." Would that have satisfied the congregation? The congregation would have thought, "That preacher just appoints his own men, and it's the same old crowd." Notice, however, what Peter and the disciples did. They said, "Choose out seven men you can trust. We want them to be men of good reputation. We want them to be spiritually minded men with good common sense. You choose them, and we will appoint them."

There was no attempt on the part of the apostles to control the (p.73) choice. They said, "We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." Prayer is *in* communion with God; thinking about His mind, His will. It is being conscious of Him. It is having your ear opened to His Word, and your heart sensitive to His call. Prayer is being in relationship with Him where you refer your own problems to His guidance and wait for Him to help you make up your mind. Prayer is much more than just saying prayers.

There is one thing even worse than a family quarrel, that is a church quarrel. A church quarrel is the devil's picnic. When people in the church quarrel with each other, the devil can laugh up his sleeve. What makes a church quarrel so difficult to handle is that everyone feels he is right, everyone in the quarrel thinks that the other person is to blame. That's the way it was in this early church. In this difficulty in the early church, social factors produced the tension. It would be the same in your congregation if you had some rich people and some poor people; if you had some well-educated people, and some who had not been to college. Perhaps the minister associates with the rich people, and his fellowship is with the people who have leisure. Here, for instance, is a man in the congregation who is boss of his own business. He can take off two hours in the afternoon if he wants to. He can take the preacher and play a game of golf, or they can go fishing. Now there is another member of the church who works at a daily wage. He has to punch a time clock. He can't take the preacher any place, because of his employment. After a while, in that congregation it can be easy for the working people to feel that the preacher is neglecting them. He is with these other people more.

In the early church, the apostles accepted the obvious evidence of tension in that congregation. There was a feeling of dissatisfaction which was real. Whether it was justified or not is not the question. With humility and wisdom, the apostles told these people, "You elect seven men, and we will put them over this thing, and we will give ourselves to prayer and ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude" (Acts 6:5). The whole congregation was satisfied, as they elected seven men.

You probably would not notice anything unusual about these names, but they were Greek names. These seven men who were elected were chosen from the Greek portion of the congregation. Even the Jewish-speaking members of the church evidently joined in electing those men. They elected men who were from the outside, because they would know the very people who were discontented and dissatisfied. They put these men in charge "whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on (p.74) them" (Acts 6:6). There was no attempt to overrule; no attempt to bulldoze their way through. No, not at all! There was genuine sympathy. These people from the outside, these Greek-speaking Jews, felt neglected. But when they picked out seven Greek-speaking men, the apostles appointed them, and put them in charge, and that was the end of the quarrel.

"And the word of God increased" (Acts 6:7). How could the Word of God increase? What happens to the beans in your garden when you plant them? They grow and produce more beans. When you plant potatoes, they grow and produce more potatoes. When the Word of God increased, it bore fruit. There was a harvest. "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly" (Acts 6:7). Many people joined the church.

Perhaps there is a quarrel in your church. Perhaps some of the congregation want to move the church and others do not. Some want to build a new building, and some are satisfied with the one they have. Some want to spend money on developing the grounds, and others want to give more to foreign missions. A quarrel begins and personal feelings become involved. It becomes known that there is a big split in that congregation. In such a case, people don't want to join that church. Some might say, "I would like to belong to that church, but I don't want to get involved in a church quarrel. I have enough trouble on my hands without going to church and having more trouble." But when there is peace and good will in a congregation, people will come! People are attracted to a church like that.

". . . the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). Who are these priests? They are the educated people. A church can advance when it has people who have a good education. People with college educations can be useful to the church, and some of our greatest leaders have been educated men. Moses was a man learned in all

the wisdom of the Egyptians. Daniel was ten times wiser than all the other learned men in his time. John Wesley was an Oxford graduate. John Calvin was a university graduate. Martin Luther was a seminary professor. Education is helpful! But people whose minds are disciplined in education tend to stay away from a church where there is quarreling. They do not like to come to a church where there is trouble.

This was the experience of the early church. Many of the great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. That was the blessing that came upon the early church, because they solved their problems. When a church has peace in the congregation, you will (p.75) discover its drawing power in the community. If we want to advance our local congregation, we should pray to God to give our people the spirit to get along with each other.

"And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people" (Acts 6:8). In verse five, Stephen was the first deacon mentioned. He was elected and given responsibility for leadership. I am not sure that this means that he was going to spend his whole time in pastoral work. He was a man in the community who had a strong witness for his faith in Christ. But whenever you have any new strong voice for the Gospel, opposition will arise. It is sad but true. The moment you begin to testify for the Lord, someone will oppose you.

When the Lord Jesus Christ came, His was a new voice. He created a disturbance, and the people resisted and eventually killed Him. When Peter and John began to preach, the high priests and Sadducees were offended and grieved. They arrested them, brought them into court, and told them not to preach any more. When Paul went out to preach, he was abused. The Jews and the Gentiles were against him, and he was bitterly persecuted.

John Calvin lived in Switzerland as a refugee from France. John Knox, the Scottish Presbyterian, lived in danger of his life, because of government opposition to his preaching. John Wesley was stoned, as riots were aroused against him. At one place in John Wesley's diary he writes that no one had thrown any rotten eggs and vegetables at him for several days. He writes, "I wonder whether I am still preaching the Gospel." Even in our day and time, you will find opposition to Billy Graham. Some of the most conservative people in the church oppose Billy Graham. They think he is too liberal, while the liberals who do not use the Bible oppose Billy Graham because he uses the Bible.

Have you recently had a profound, personal experience of the Lord? Has your own heart been touched? Do you want to start Bible reading in a new way? You won't be able to do it without opposition. Do you want to institute prayer where there was no prayer before? You won't get it done without opposition.

"Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen" (Acts 6:9). These people were all from outside of Jerusalem and Stephen was one of the men from outside of Jerusalem, yet they argued with Stephen. "And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake" (Acts 6:10). It is wonderful when a man's heart is right with God. It says in the Old Testament that (p.76) "when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Proverbs 16:7). Truly, if a man is wise and humble, it is hard to argue against him. "Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God. And they stirred up the people . . ." (Acts 6:11, 12). They brought in false witnesses, who misrepresented what Stephen was saying. Stephen told them that the building made of stone and wood was not the temple, that the temple was in their own hearts. This statement was misrepresented to say that he was against the temple, and the people were aroused.

"And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against

this holy place, and the law: For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel" (Acts 6:13-15). When they looked on him, they did not see any anger or hatred. They were lying about him, but Stephen had compassion on them. Nor was he the least afraid of what was going to happen to him. In his face was a deep joy because he had had a chance to bear witness to his Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Something like that can happen to you if you are faithful in your witness for the Gospel.

Stephen was in court and had been accused of preaching against the law of Moses, against the temple, the sacrifices, and the whole program of Jewish worship. He had been accused, in a sense, of being a traitor. "Then said the high priest, Are these things so?" (Acts 7:1). This was the question asked of Stephen. For the next forty-nine verses of chapter seven Stephen gave his defense, as he made a direct appeal to the Jewish Scriptures. The Jews believed in the Old Testament Scriptures as the Word of God. Stephen, himself, was a Jew. He preached that the promises of the Old Testament were fulfilled in the work and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, now Lord and Christ.

Stephen told the Jews that God intended to bless His people by coming to dwell in them. Many of the promises of the Old Testament have real meaning if God is among His people, dwelling in the midst of them. The Jewish people believed that was why they had the temple. The temple was where they met God. Stephen told them that God does not dwell in a temple made with hands, such as the one in Jerusalem. He said that God dwells in the hearts of men. Therefore, the temple was a symbol, an illustration of the truth.

When they heard these things, they were provoked and irritated. They claimed that Stephen was undoing the teaching of the (p.77) past and that everything he taught was contrary to what they believed. These Jews spoke of the temple as being the dwelling place of God. They called on Stephen to answer their accusations. Stephen did not deny the charges. He did not defend himself, nor apologize for his actions. Nor did he contest the veracity of the witnesses. He simply said that the truth is a greater revelation than what they had previously believed. When he gave his report, he reviewed the whole history of Israel, tracing God's sovereign grace in dealing with Israel. In verses two through nine of chapter seven he spoke of the call of Abraham and the life of the patriarchs. He mentioned Isaac and Jacob and Joseph indicating that God was over them and leading them.

In verses ten to sixteen, he pointed out how Israel was brought down into Egypt under the hand of God during the time of Joseph, and that God's will was being done even then. In verses seventeen to nineteen he pointed out that the "time of the promise drew nigh." This was God's promise to bring Israel out of Egypt. Trouble had arisen in Egypt and the Israelites were anxious to get out. Then Moses was sent. In verses twenty to thirty-six he told how Moses was sent from God, and led the people out of the land of Egypt. In verses thirty-seven to forty-one, Stephen told how the Israelites rebelled against Moses. They made a golden calf and had to be chastened for this action. Then, in verses forty-two and forty-three, Stephen pointed out that repeated rebellion occurred, and the people went against the will of God. We read that "God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets" (Acts 7:42).

Stephen, in his long speech, had covered the history of the Jews from the exodus to the prophets. He said that repeated rebellion had marred their history. In other words, the Hebrews made the golden calf in the desert, and in the time of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Micah and Joel, the people turned their hearts from the true God to worship idols. In verses forty-four and forty-five he pointed out that, under the guidance of God, the people built the tabernacle, which was a place for worshiping God. It was a temporary

structure, like a tent, and made of skins of animals. They had communion with God in this tent. Later a temple was built by Solomon. David had wanted to build a temple, but was not allowed to do so.

Stephen then came to the place where he was accused. God does not dwell in the temple, he told them, He dwells in hearts, which are the true temple of God. Yet even after telling them all of this, Stephen saw that they were rebelling, so he reminded them rather bluntly that they were acting no differently than their (p.78) fathers. "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the just One [the Lord Jesus Christ]; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers" (Acts 7:51, 52). Throughout all their history the people of Israel had always been against the prophets. When the Lord Jesus Christ came, they put Him to death. They were resisting the truth even as Stephen was speaking.

In all of this there was not the least retraction, for Stephen did not take back one single thing he had said. His hearers were horrified and enraged. "When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth" (Acts 7:54).

What should all this mean to us? I believe the lesson is plain. Do you have anyone in your family who thinks that just because they go to church they are good? Perhaps you might tell them that it takes more than just going to church to make a Christian. In saying this, are you talking against the church? Some people might think that you were.

"But he [Stephen], being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord" (Acts 7:55-57). Being full of the Holy Spirit means that he was completely yielded to God. He knew that God was with him and that God was in him. He was conscious of the fact that the Lord God Himself dwelt in his heart. He was looking into the face of Jesus Christ who was actually alive. There was not any part of his consciousness that was not influenced by the Holy Spirit.

He "looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." He bore witness as to what he saw, but the enraged crowd could not see anything. It is a good deal as if a person were looking through a telescope. One man could look through a telescope and see three stars. Another man without a telescope could not see any, but that does not change the number of stars that are there, for one of them sees more accurately than the other. So it is, with reference to Stephen.

"Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord." That is the way they reacted. They made a big noise, plugged up their ears with their fingers "and (p.79) ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him" (Acts 7:57, 58). "They cast him out of the city" because there was a law against stoning a man to death inside the city limits. Outside the city they threw stone after stone until they had killed him.

"And the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet . . ." (Acts 7:58). Their garments got in their way when they threw stones at Stephen. The young man's name was Saul. This is the first time that this man who became the great Apostle Paul is mentioned in Acts. It does not say that he threw any of the stones, but he was there, and they laid their clothes at his feet, so no one would take them. Perhaps Saul was affected by what happened as he saw Stephen die. He heard Stephen say, "I see the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." Later, on the Damascus road, Saul also saw the Lord Jesus personally.

"And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59). Stephen did not pray, "Lord, stop them!" Or, "Lord, send the soldiers to deliver me out of this!" Rather he asked, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Take charge of me. Let my spirit go home to you." He was expecting to be killed, and he was ready for his death. He realized that it was God's will for him to die for Christ's name sake.

"And he kneeled down, and cried out with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:60). That reminds us so much of Calvary. Remember how the Lord Jesus, hanging on the cross, said, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." Stephen is not saying that what they were doing was right; he simply had the grace of God in his heart, which moved him to ask Almighty God to forgive them for this. That is not saying that those men are going to be saved. All Stephen is saying is, "Lay not this sin to their charge." He is saying, "Father, when it comes to reckoning with these people, don't hold this against them."

Personally, I think that when those men come into the presence of God they are going to give an answer for their rejection of Jesus Christ as Saviour. I have a feeling, however, that they will never be asked to answer for the stoning of Stephen. My own thought is that Stephen will be granted this request. They will be responsible for other things, but not for this.

"And when he had said this, he fell asleep" (Acts 7:60). From the Greek the best way to translate this is "He fell on slumber." It's the language you would use if a baby fell asleep. In this violent situation, with these cruel and angry men stoning him to death, Stephen fell asleep like a little child in its mothers arms. "Asleep in (p.80) the arms of Jesus, safe on His gentle breast." You may never be called upon to endure physical death like that. But you do suffer rejection and you do have trouble with people who do not like your emphasis on spiritual things. Take Stephen as an example. Be kind and generous to such people, and pray for them.

"And Saul was consenting unto his death . . ." (Acts 8:1). Saul became the greatest, most important servant of the Lord Jesus Christ in the early church. However, at this time he consented to the martyrdom of Stephen. "And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem . . ." (Acts 8:1). Who were the Christians bothering? Who was being troubled by them? Were they causing hurt or harm to anyone? The only people they were disturbing were the religious leaders of the community.

Oh, the bitterness with which some people oppose others, for no reason except the fact that they regularly read their Bible. That is how it was in the early church. The church was greatly persecuted at Jerusalem, so the Christians had to leave the city, because of their faithful testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ, ". . . and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1). The apostles stayed in the city of Jerusalem, but other Christians were forced to leave.

"And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison" (Acts 8:2, 3). Saul opposed the Gospel and made life miserable for anyone who accepted it. He was young, active, strong, brilliant, and he was prejudiced.

"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). The first three verses of this eighth chapter present a dark picture. It is tragic to think that men are in trouble just because they believe in the Lord. It is sad that this needless, senseless, blind, ignorant and prejudiced opposition should be able to push them out of their city, but it did. These early Christians were driven from their homes and scattered abroad. Today people are sometimes driven out of congregations and

away from the fellowship of other Christians because of their testimony concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word." If these early Christians had all stayed in one place, the Gospel would not have spread nearly as rapidly as it did. They were obliged to leave, and when they did, they took the Gospel with them.

This incident reminds me of attempting to destroy a fire. You (p.81) might rake all the burning coals into a pile, take a big shovel and scoop them up, and then fling them far and wide. Have you destroyed the fire? No indeed, for everywhere these burning coals land, a new fire would start. Instead of putting out the original fire, you have merely spread it to several locations.

There is a saying that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." "They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word." The action taken against the Gospel spread it further, and the persecution and death of Stephen only strengthened the witness of the church. (p.82)

CHAPTER SEVEN

(Acts 8:5-9:31)

Have you ever been discouraged and wondered if the forces that make for worldliness in the church will finally win out until your church has no more spiritual life? Has it ever seemed to you that, with the church being criticized on every hand and people neglecting its services and often leaving it altogether, that eventually our churches will be closed up? Have you sometimes been disheartened by the way things are going in your own denomination?

Let me remind you of something. No one in the world can stop God! Enemies of the Gospel may be able to stop a Sunday school teacher, or get rid of a certain preacher, but God is omnipotent. He is not bound by our human limitations and frailties. If the testimony of every one of us who are trying to preach the Gospel were stopped, God would still have His own way of bringing His will to pass in the world. He makes use of human instruments, but He is not limited to them to achieve His purposes in this world.

"Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them" (Acts 8:5). You cannot stop God's witnesses. "And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did" (Acts 8:6). Philip's preaching produced results! People were changed. "For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city" (Acts 8:7, 8). Here is a complete contrast! The people of Jerusalem, who had heard the Lord Jesus Christ, had rejected Him, had rejected the church, and had taken action to stamp it out, if possible, as they drove the Christians out of the city. In Samaria, as Philip began to preach the Gospel, people's lives were changed, and there was great joy. You may be discouraged today, my Christian friend, and your outlook may be gloomy, but God is by no means at the end of His power! (p.83)

"But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one" (Acts 8:9). We might call sorcery *black magic* or *witchcraft*. Simon was a man who, if he had been in Africa, would have been called a medicine man. In certain sections of our country, he would be spoken of as one who could "put a hex upon you." He was supposed to have great influence in spiritual matters, but the spirits with whom he dealt were evil spirits. "To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God" (Acts 8:10). Apparently he was able to accomplish many things, and was considered to be an important man. "And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries" (Acts 8:11). He had built himself up in the estimation of the country by his devil-inspired sorcery.

"But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12). Those who believed were delivered from the influence of this sorcerer. Belief in the Lord Jesus Christ set them free from the power of the devil.

"Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done" (Acts 8:13). We should watch this man. He believed because so many around him believed. Everyone else seemed to be coming into the church, so he came too, but later he was going to cause trouble.

"Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God,

they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost" (Acts 8:14-17).

When the church at Jerusalem, the mother church, heard about these new converts in Samaria, they sent their two best preachers and teachers there to make sure that these young Christians would enter into spiritual fellowship with God; that they might know the joy of personal relationship with the Father through the Holy Spirit. There are many sincere people today who are trusting the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls, but who know practically nothing about the Holy Spirit of God. The Lord Jesus never intended for you to make your way home alone. He has been calling you to come home, but He never intended that you should live by (p.84) yourself. He meant you to have the Holy Spirit in your heart. He meant you to have personal, daily contact with the Holy Spirit of God.

Have you ever traveled into a new city, and had someone ask you if you have seen their park? You might say that you have heard of the park, but have never had the pleasure of seeing it, so they say they will take you to see it. These friends drive by on the street and point out the location of the park, and the entrance gates. Did you see the park? No, you only saw it from a distance, through the open entrance gates. If you were going to see that park, you would have to enter those gates, go up one road and down another, and see the flowers, the trees, the playgrounds, the pavilion and the ball diamond. Then you could tell, from personal experience, what that famous park was like.

In Samaria, many people had believed. They saw the things that Philip did and heard what he said, and they were impressed. They had been taught much about the Gospel, and they had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. But they had not entered into actual relationship with God; the Holy Spirit had not yet taken up His residence within their hearts. There is such a thing as hearing the Gospel, accepting it as true, and yet not entering into that close fellowship with God which follows when you receive, consciously, understandingly, intelligently, the presence of God into your soul, through the Holy Spirit. Peter and John, understanding this matter, experiencing this indwelling Presence, were able to lead the people of Samaria into the full truth, by prayer and personal guidance.

"And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost" (Acts 8:18, 19). When Simon saw Peter and John leading people into fellowship with God by the reception of the Holy Spirit into their hearts, he thought he could profit by such power, and he offered them money so that he might have this same ability.

"But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8:20-23).

Simon, you will remember, was the most important man in the community. Everyone looked up to him, and when he joined the (p.85) church it was considered a big event. Yet Peter told Simon that he did not understand at all about spiritual matters. Peter told him further that he had better pray and ask God to forgive him for thinking that he could buy the power of God with money. Only the Lord Jesus Christ can give the Holy Spirit to anyone.

It is the Lord Jesus Christ who will send the Holy Spirit into your heart. You must be willing to allow Him to give the Holy Spirit to you permanently. You must open your heart to the knowledge that God

is going to be dwelling in you from now on. By the grace of God, by the presence of the Holy Spirit, by the Lord Jesus Christ, God Himself is going to be actually dwelling in your soul. You cannot buy the presence of God. Peter, judging this man Simon, told him that he was all wrong.

"Then answered Simon and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me. And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans. And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise and go toward the south" (Acts 8:24-26). How many of us believe that the Lord is alive and can deal with us, man to man? How many of us think that we can receive guidance from the Lord? This is what Philip had. There is no description of the "angel of the Lord." We don't know who he was or what he was like. The angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, "Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went" (Acts 8:26,27). He went, just as simply as that -- no argument, no explanation -- he quietly obeyed.

But, you say to yourself, a man just does not get up and leave the country. There must be something more involved. But I tell you, Philip was a man who had his luggage ready. He was always prepared to move, but his heart was indwelt by the Spirit, and he was not his own master, so he waited the Spirit's leading before acting.

"And behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship" (Acts 8:27). In our government system, we would call the eunuch the "Secretary of the Treasury." He was the comptroller of the realm. He had come to Jerusalem to worship. Although he was an Ethiopian, he was a proselyte who believed in the Jewish teaching. He came to Jerusalem to worship God after the manner of the Jews. He "was returning [from Jerusalem where he had been to worship], and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, (p.86) Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him" (Acts 8:28-30). He ran! He was ready, quick to obey. Oh, how often we drag our feet. We have a feeling that we should ask someone to attend church, meaning perhaps next year, or perhaps, when it is convenient. But "Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias" (Acts 8:30).

This eunuch from Ethiopia was reading the Old Testament Scripture out loud, from the prophecy of Isaiah. Philip listened, and said, "Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me?" (Acts 8:30, 31).

By the way, notice that reading the Scriptures is not enough. If an unbeliever reads the Scriptures, it can be helpful up to a certain point. But it would be far more helpful if someone who knew the Lord could explain to the unbeliever what the Scriptures mean.

"And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him" (Acts 8:31). The Scripture from which he read was the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, which reads thus:

"He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was out off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken" (verses 7, 8).

"And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:34, 35). Start with any Scripture, and lead the listener to see the Lord Jesus. That is the thing to do. All Scripture has to be related to Jesus Christ. If the Lord Jesus had not died on

Calvary, Philip would not have been able to preach in this way. But, since the Lord Jesus had been led as a sheep to the slaughter when they put Him on the cross, Philip was able to take that Old Testament passage and show this Ethiopian what the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ really meant.

"And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" (Acts 8:36). In other words, "Is there any reason why I could not be a Christian; any reason why I could not be one of you?" This ceremony of baptism was an outward act, performed by people who made a profession of their faith. The Ethiopian knew this and asked why he could not be baptized. "Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest" (Acts 8:37). Notice the phrase, "believest with all thine heart." This is not saying, "If you understand all the reasons why, or if you are sure that you believe (p.87) all the things we say." This believing includes obeying. This believing is committing one's self to God. It is entering into a personal relationship with Him. "If thou believest" means a total commitment, as you receive the Lord Jesus Christ, and you receive the Holy Spirit.

"And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37). In those days that would have been an adequate declaration. Jesus of Nazareth was the man about whom the city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. Five thousand people were declaring that He was alive. They were saying that though He had been crucified under the orders of Pontius Pilate, He was now alive; His grave was empty. This Ethiopian had just visited Jerusalem and undoubtedly had heard a good many of these things. All the excitement over the stoning of Stephen had created a big scandal. Now the Ethiopian said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the One whom Stephen saw standing at the right hand of God. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is the one who was put to death on Calvary's cross. This is the one whose body was put in the grave, and then the grave was found empty. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

"And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip" (Acts 8:38, 39). In verse twenty-six, the angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, "Arise, and go toward the south," and he went. Then, in verse twenty-nine, the spirit said unto Philip, "Go near, and join thyself to this chariot," and he ran. Now, "the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39). The Ethiopian thanked the Lord for the testimony of Philip.

Perhaps there has been some minister who has been a real help to you. He has been a good friend, but God has called him away, has removed him from your church. That is the loss of a good friend, and of a personal fellowship. But look up! You did not lose the One you are trusting in. You did not trust in the preacher. You trusted in the Lord! The preacher can go, but the Lord will not go! The Ethiopian knew this. Philip's work was over. But the eunuch knew the Lord, and he went on his way rejoicing. He was not rejoicing because Philip had left. No, he was rejoicing because the Lord Jesus had not gone.

"But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea" (Acts 8:40). There you have the course, the work, and the testimony of a real evangelist. It (p.88) is a man who is called of God to show people the Lord Jesus Christ; to lead them to an understanding and accepting of Jesus Christ and then to move on to another city. When people accept Jesus Christ, He actually comes to stay with them. We are helped by preachers and teachers, but our faith is in the Lord.

"And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1, 2). We

first met Saul at the death of Stephen. The people who were stoning Stephen to death laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. They took off their cloaks, so that they could throw the stones better. Although he was only a young man, he became a bitter persecutor of the Christians. He thought they were wrong and that they should be stopped. He felt that their preaching and teaching was spreading untruth and disturbing the people. He obtained authority from the chief priests, like a sheriff would bring a warrant for an arrest, to make these people stop their talking, or bring them before the council of Jerusalem, and penalize them in some fashion. Some of these people were actually put to death. "And of this way" means the way of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven. And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:3, 4). That bright light was so strong that it knocked him down. Saul did not think he was persecuting any one person. He had arrested many different men and women, and brought them to prison. Who was this one person he was persecuting?

"And he said, Who art thou, Lord?" (Acts 9:5). When he used the word "Lord," he did not mean what you mean when you say the Lord Jesus Christ. It was a term of respect. For instance, we might say, "Who are you, sir?" Maybe it was more than that. Perhaps he had a feeling that this was some great power or authority. At any rate, I do not think that he knew who it was.

"And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest" (Acts 9:5). That must have been a shock to Saul. He did not have any idea that he was persecuting the Lord Jesus. When you hear someone making fun of the church, they would be rather shocked if the Lord spoke to them and said, "I don't appreciate your criticizing me." They might say that they were not criticizing Him, only the church. Ah, but they were criticizing Him! Saul did not think that (p.89) he was criticizing Jesus Christ. He thought he was doing this to some Jews who did not understand. He thought Jesus Christ was dead.

"It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" (Acts 9:5). In other words, "It is hard for you to resist the pricking of your own conscience." This phrase, "to kick against the pricks," came from men who drove oxen. Oxen are very slow, and can be very tough also. An ox can be so hardened and callous that whipping him will not scare him. He is so tough, that a stick will break if applied to him. Well, how could you get him to move? If you will look at his hind feet, at the joint where the hoof is fastened onto the leg, there is a soft spot. It looks like an ankle, but it is what we call the fetlock. It is a very tender spot. The drivers take a long stick and dig the ox in the soft spot just above the hoof. That was the prick. Some oxen would kick back when they were pricked. Of course, this only made it worse, because they would kick back right into this sharp stick. This is the significance of the phrase, "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." The Lord was driving Saul by pricking him, and that is why some of us talk about pricks of conscience.

Saul had "pricks of conscience" when he saw Stephen die for his faith. Stephen was a "man with a face of an angel," and who was not doing any harm to anyone. It bothered Saul when he saw men and women hauled off to prison. They did not fight or blame him, and they were kind and meek. There is no doubt that Saul was pricked in his conscience about these events. "And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). It is tremendous to think that just that suddenly, the man's whole frame of mind is completely reversed.

You might be concerned about some person you are praying for because they seem so set against the Gospel. Don't give up! You do not know what is going on in that person's heart and mind. The very fact that they are so bitter may be because they are under much tension about this. A wife may be much concerned about her husband. The man is becoming very intolerant with her. It may be that he is intolerant,

prejudiced and bitter because inwardly he is being goaded in conscience.

Have you ever heard about some person coming under conviction? Saul had been under conviction ever since he saw Stephen stoned to death, and had seen how patiently the Christians endured persecution. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He seems to have surrendered. He has turned himself over completely in a lightning flash. It can happen immediately.

Have you had your Christian experience gradually, where you (p.90) have come to believe it is a good deal like the breaking of day? First a little light; then more, then more, then more? Before you know what has happened it is broad daylight. That is one way of coming to faith in Jesus Christ. But there is another way of coming, and this is it. Out of darkness into His marvelous light, sometimes in a blinding flash. This is how it happened to Saul.

"And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do" (Acts 9:6). Sometimes you wonder how the Lord would lead you. Sometimes you wonder whether God wants you to do this or do that. Many times you are frustrated because you want to see far down the road. The Lord will show you what you are to do! Do what is in front of you now. "Arise, go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."

A young couple decided to give their lives in full-time service to the Lord. As long as they tried to see clearly what they would ultimately do, they were not able to come to any decision. But it dawned on them in their praying and meditation the Lord could show them later what they should do. The important thing was to enlist in His service now. When they realized this it was not long until they saw the road ahead clearly.

"And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man" (Acts 9:7). You might think this was all imagination. It was not! It was a real voice! "And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man" (Acts 9:8). He was blind. "But they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink" (Acts 9:8, 9). He did not eat or drink, because he was so deeply affected. He had met the Lord! I believe Paul was thinking of all the times he had opposed the preaching of the Gospel and how blind he had been.

Late in his life, Paul wrote to Timothy regarding this experience. "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (I Timothy 1:12-17). Paul's heart just (p.91) overflowed with gratitude and praise to God for God's mercy and kindness in winning him when he was so stubbornly set in prejudice against Him.

In the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, God used Philip to tell him about the Lord Jesus Christ. In the conversion of Saul of Tarsus there is very little of the human element. This is something that God Himself does in the heart of Saul. This does not mean there has not been a human element involved previously. I suppose that never in his lifetime did he get over what he saw when he was looking at Stephen, with his face as it had been that of an angel. That must have made a profound impression on the Apostle Paul.

In dealing with the Ethiopian, the problem was to overcome ignorance. And it was done by sending a

man to teach him. But with Saul, the problem was not ignorance, it was prejudice. No one talked to him directly, but the Lord met him on the way. That light shone from heaven. But that is not the whole story. Even with Saul there was a human element involved. "There was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight" (Acts 9:10-12).

The Lord personally dealt with Ananias, person to person.

"Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here be hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name" (Acts 9:13, 14). Ananias did not mean to be disobedient but Ananias was confused. Ananias said, "Lord, that man is dangerous. If I go and identify myself as a Christian, he is liable to arrest me and take me away with him." "But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way" (you go on and do what I tell you) "for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts 9:15, 16). And Ananias, went his way. No further argument. He had expressed his doubt, and had made it clear that he was surprised with the Lord's instructions. But when the Lord made it clear that He knew what He was doing, "Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately (p.92) there fell from his eyes as it had been scales; and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized" (Acts 9:17, 18).

He had told the Lord that this man Saul was a dangerous man. Now he says, "Brother Saul." Why? Because when the Lord told him that Saul belonged to Him, and that He was going to use him, Ananias knew that if Saul belonged to the Lord Jesus Christ and Ananias belonged to the Lord Jesus Christ, they belonged to each other. And so he starts his talk, "Brother Saul." "And when he had received meat, he [Paul] was strengthened" (Acts 9:19).

The Apostle Paul had been stricken blind. For three days he was there, doubtless wondering in himself, praying in himself about all these things and then the Lord Jesus Himself sent Ananias, and said, "I want you to go there. I have shown him in a vision that you are coming and he will not be surprised to see you. I want you to baptize him. He will receive his sight, and I want you to let him know that he belongs now and he is in with this group." Ananias had his natural fears about Paul. He knew that he was a dangerous man. But the Lord told him to go. And he went without any argument. "Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus" (Acts 9:19).

For many of us life moves along from day to day as a rather routine thing. We go to church, we hear the same preacher, and the same families sit in the same pews week after week. Every now and again, we have an exception. Some man who lived a worldly life becomes a Christian. When such a man is converted, it creates a stir and it does something to people. It is part of the Lord's way of attracting attention to the Gospel.

Something like this happened in the early church when Saul the Pharisee, the noted persecutor of the church, became a Christian. The man who had been the most zealous against the church, was suddenly changed into a man who became the most earnest worker for the church. "And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). This is a man who once did not believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God. He believed in God, but he did not believe that he would be saved through the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, he was converted. "But all that heard him were amazed, and

said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?" (Acts 9:21). They did not understand it. Why is he now talking in favor of Jesus? "But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ" (Acts 9:22). (p.93)

When he came to believe it, he wanted to tell everyone else about it. Saul learned to understand the Scriptures more, and as he grew in knowledge, he learned more about interpreting the Scriptures, thus confounding the Jews. He confused and frustrated them.

"And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him" (Acts 9:23). He provoked them so much that they decided they would kill him. "But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket" (Acts 9:25). Have you ever had the idea that if you were a Christian and were telling the truth, you should just stand up in front of everyone no matter what they did? The Jews were going to kill Saul, and they watched the gates day and night to kill him, in case he ever went out of that city. But the disciples took him by night and let him down by the wall in a basket. He did not go out the gate. Saul was not a coward, but he was wise. "He who fights and runs away will live to fight another day." Being a Christian does not mean that you have to stick with every argument to the bitter end. You might get into a situation where the thing for you to do is withdraw.

Saul eventually died for his faith. Saul was perfectly willing to die for his faith even at this point. But that did not mean that he was going to let the first bunch of hoodlums kill him, when he had a whole life of ministry ahead.

"And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples [he wanted to join the church there]: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple" (Acts 9:26). Saul was notorious everywhere, as being bitterly opposed to the Christians. When he came along, they thought he was a spy.

"But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus" (Acts 9:27). He sponsored Saul. The people said that he was dangerous, but Barnabas said, "You don't have to be afraid." Barnabas said, "Saul has been converted. He saw the Lord in the way." That was his experience. "He had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus." That was his public testimony. And that was the ground on which Barnabas said you could trust this man.

"And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem" (Acts 9:28). They took him in the church. "And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians" (p.94) (Acts 9:29). The Grecians were the Greek-educated Jews. They had been educated in Greek universities and in Greek philosophy, as Paul himself had been. "But they went about to slay him" (Acts 9:29), which means they tried to kill him there. "Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied" (Acts 9:30, 31).

We can learn something from this last sentence. First of all, the churches had rest. As long as there is disturbance, if there is quarrelsomeness or unhappiness or tension, spirituality suffers. But when the churches had rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, they were "edified." The word *edified* comes from the word edifice and means build up. People became stronger in faith, humbler in spirit, meeker in their attitude toward other people, and more confident in their relationship with God. They were made to be stronger Christians.

"Walking in the fear of the Lord." This phrase, "the fear of the Lord," means "reverencing God." It means a due appreciation of God, a reverent honoring of God. As they lived, they were conscious of the greatness of God, the majesty of God, and the glory of God. They walked softly in His Presence. They walked also in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. You might say, "What would they have to be comforted about?" Their sins, their weaknesses, their failures, their disappointments and perhaps even their loss of property and loss of friends. Many things had happened to them just because they had become Christians. How would the Holy Spirit comfort them if they lost property? Would He give them more property? If they lost friends, would He necessarily bring them more friends? That is not the way the Holy Spirit comforts. He would comfort them by reminding them of the love, the grace and the fellowship of God, and of the communion they would have with God.

Take for example a man who, because he has become a Christian, has lost a group of friends: he will find other friends, but this is not necessarily the comfort of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will remind him that he has *one* friend that "sticketh closer than a brother." If a person loses his property, how will the Holy Spirit comfort him? Will He comfort him by telling him that he is going to make more money somewhere else? No. He will comfort him by reminding him that God will take care of him, and that he can put his trust in God. He may lose all his property, but he will not lose God and God is worth more than the property. (p.95)

When the Holy Spirit is comforting the hearts of the Christians in the church, and they are walking softly in the presence of God, it is amazing how attractive that is to people outside. So we find that people came. We read that "they were multiplied." More people joined the church. People do not come to the Lord Jesus Christ to get rich, or to get a good job; they came to be forgiven, to have fellowship with God and to lay up their treasures in heaven. Circumstances in the world may continue as they were, or they may even get worse. But where before they stood alone, now they are never alone! Before they were in their own strength, now they are not. (p.96)

CHAPTER EIGHT

(Acts 9:32 - 11:18)

Now our attention is shifted from Paul to Peter. "And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters [all sections of the country] he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda. And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately. And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord" (Acts 9:32-35).

This is a very simple story of a miracle of healing, but it was not a commonplace occurrence in that community. Everyone knew Aeneas had been sick in bed for eight years, and his healing made a tremendous impression upon the people.

"Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas; this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds, which she did" (Acts 9:36). Many churches today have Dorcas Societies named after this woman. Dorcas was a great woman because of her good works. "It came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber" (Acts 9:37). They were expecting of course, to bury her. "And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them" (Acts 9:38). They urged him to come right away. "Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber; and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive. And it was known throughout all (p.97) Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner" (Acts 9:39-43).

Peter thus exercised his faith on behalf of two different people: Aeneas who had been sick with the palsy for eight years, and Dorcas who had died and was lying in her upper chamber ready for burial. In each case because of his faith, a miracle was worked, with the result that many turned to God. When things happen to people because of the preaching of the Gospel, others see it and are affected. If nothing ever happens, it is hard to bring people to the Lord.

We may not have that kind of physical experience today, although I am not going to preclude the possibility that such things could happen. We do have certain spiritual manifestations of the power of God. Let us not belittle those.

For instance, suppose the Gospel is preached in a certain community. There lives a man who has for a great length of time shown an actual opposition to the church. He has been steadfastly opposed to its work, and would have nothing to do with it. Suppose a minister comes into that community and begins to preach and that man is converted. Don't you think that would make a tremendous impression on the community? I think it would be just as real a miracle as this one we have here. I remember a woman who had been very active in the church, held an office in the woman's work, and was known to be in the church every Sunday with her two daughters. Then she quit coming altogether!

Some years later, I talked with her in her home, because she had not been coming to church. I felt that I should say something to her. I asked her, "How is it with your soul?"

She was a little startled to have me ask the question, but she was honest. And she said, "Well, not good."

I said, "Tell me about it."

She said the things of heaven were not as real as they used to be. She used to have faith in God, but not any more. Then she began to apologize for not coming to church and explained why she couldn't come. She gave the same reasons that she had given through all the years.

I paid little attention to these reasons because I was not asking her about them. I wanted to know how it was going with her own soul, and she had already given me the answer. I asked, "Why shouldn't it go well? Do you listen to men preaching over the radio?"

"No."

"Do you read the Bible by yourself?"

She admitted she did not read it.

I asked her if she read books that discuss the Bible. (p.98)

"No."

Then I said, "If you did not eat for a long time, after a while you would get weak and not feel like doing anything. That is exactly your spiritual condition now. You have starved your soul, and right now you have no spiritual strength at all."

You could say to yourself, "Such a person is dead spiritually." And they would be. Such a person, however, can be revived. Such a person can actually be brought back to life, spiritually, and become sensitive again to the things of God. And such a result in the spiritual world would be as big an event as when Dorcas was raised from the dead through the ministry of Peter, and by the power of God. In any case, such an event would definitely turn the mind of the community to the things of the Lord.

As we begin our study of chapter ten, we find first a man by the name of Cornelius. "There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band [he was an officer in the army, an Italian on military duty in Palestine], A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always" (Acts 10:1, 2).

This is a remarkable testimony for a man to have. He prayed to God, worshiped God, honored and respected God with all his household. He kept his children in line, so that when the time came to honor God they took part in the worship. Cornelius was charitable to the poor, praying to God always. You might say, "Well, certainly that is a good man. What more would he need?"

"He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day [three o'clock in the afternoon] an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God" (Acts 10:3, 4). God had taken note of his sincerity, and the way in which he prayed. He had taken note of the way in which he gave to the poor. "And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side; he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do" (Acts 10:5, 6). Thus God told Cornelius through the angel to send to Joppa, and get Simon Peter. There is more to being in right relationship with God than being devout, fearing Him, giving to the poor and praying. Prayers and the alms are important, but there is more than that. That doesn't mean that the praying, giving of alms, fearing God and being devout is bad, but there is something else that must be done. "And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of (p.99) them that waited on him continually; and when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa" (Acts 10:7, 8). So Cornelius sent a committee of three, two of his servants and a soldier, to bring Peter to explain to

Cornelius what he needed to do.

Have you ever wondered how men in Bible times came to know the mind of God for them? Have you ever wondered whether God had some special way of conveying the truth to them? Some people say that these Bible characters thought on things a good deal and because of their keen insight, they were able by reasoning to reach an answer. At times this may have happened, but here Cornelius was given a vision from God.

"And on the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the house top to pray about the sixth hour" (Acts 10:9). As that committee of three drew nigh to the city of Joppa, Peter was on the flat rooftop, praying. "The sixth hour" means that it was about noon (dinnertime) and Peter was hungry. "But while they made ready [while food was being prepared], he fell into a trance, And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean" (Acts 10:10-14).

The word *common* we would sometimes translate as profane, but it actually means that the food would not be kosher; something that was not authorized. The Jewish people were very careful about their food. Certain animals they would eat, and certain ones they would not eat. Those they would not eat were called "common," and those which were not according to the law were called "unclean." This sheet that came down from heaven in front of Peter contained animals which were not authorized for a Jew to eat. One of the things the Jews will not eat is pork. Perhaps the sheet contained pork.

"And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common" (Acts 10:15). That was strange. Some of those creatures according to law were not lawful to eat, and yet this voice was saying, "Now, don't you call them not lawful to eat. If God cleansed them they are all right." This was done three times; three different times in his vision, he saw this sheet let down from heaven. (p.100)

Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean [Peter could not make it out. Why should this vision have been shown to him?] behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate. And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee. Then called he them in, and lodged them. [They spent the night at Peter's home.] And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him (Acts 10:17-23).

Peter did not go alone. He took along some Christians. Peter was going to visit a Gentile home, which was against social custom. Normally a Jew would not think of doing such a thing. So he took along certain brethren who could testify afterward as to exactly what happened.

And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea, [the city where Cornelius was]. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends. And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or

come unto one of another nation [when this verse says "unlawful," it means it is against the custom, against the social way of the day]; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean" (Acts 10:24-28).

Peter suddenly realized that the death of the Lord Jesus Christ was for all men, regardless of race. And because He is for all men, Peter should henceforth never call any man common or unclean. "Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?" (Acts 10:29).

In verse 30 we have the answer from Cornelius. "Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour [three o'clock in the afternoon] I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, Cornelius, thy prayer (p.101) is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God" (Acts 10:30, 31). Here is a man in the process of becoming a Christian. This man believed in God, and had dealings with God. God had sent a special messenger to him, saying, "[On account of your life, on account of your praying, on account of your giving to the poor, I am going to do something special for you.] Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon" (Acts 10.32).

"Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God" (Acts 10:33). So Peter was the preacher called on to preach.

"Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34, 35). Actually, God is gracious to all men, but He has special favor for those who sincerely seek Him in faith.

The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead (Acts 10:36-41).

Peter is here proclaiming the glorious truth that Jesus Christ was really raised from the dead.

"And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead" (Acts 10:42). Quick means alive. So Jesus Christ is judge of all the earth, both the alive and dead. Every human being must come to terms with Him. We can come to Him now and confess our sins and trust in Him, or we can stay away like a rebel and be brought into His presence when we die, and He will be our judge. In either case we are going to have to meet Him. God has appointed a day when He will judge the whole earth by the righteousness of that Man whom He hath ordained.

To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them (p.102) which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days (Acts 10:43-48).

To become a Christian you must believe in Jesus Christ, accepting the fact that He came into this

world to seek and to save the lost. To be a Christian you must believe in God, for without faith it is impossible to please Him. You will need to recognize that God is holy and that He requires man to keep His law. And in the light of the law of God, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. In order to be a Christian, you must recognize that your own conduct is counted in the sight of God as sinful. As such it is condemned. There is no possibility of reconciliation with God if you do not recognize His holiness, His righteousness, and His justice. You must also sense your own sinfulness and weakness and wrong. The common word for that is "repent." In repentance you realize that God is good, and you are not.

After you judge yourself as being unworthy, there is something else to understand. You understand that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The wonderful truth comes to you that this Almighty God, holy and righteous and just in Himself, is a God of grace, mercy, kindness and pity. He extends help to us. So the humble contrite heart that acknowledges sin and admits wrong doing, turns to God, humbly and sincerely, and honestly confesses its own shortcomings, its own weaknesses, admits that it does not have the strength it needs. This is repentance.

When you receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour, and yield yourself to Him as your Lord, because He bought and paid for you, then you have been saved by the precious blood of the Lamb. You *were* doomed to die but *now* you live, because Jesus Christ died for you. Such people willing to receive the Lord Jesus Christ, turning to God, opening their hearts to Him, asking God to come in and save them, are the people who become Christians. But one thing more is needed. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself will send His Holy Spirit into the heart of that person and the Holy Spirit of God will dwell inside a man, actually putting the thoughts of God, (p.103) the mind of God and the intentions of God in the heart. This is the very essence of Christian life and strength.

When the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius, Peter and his friends were astonished to see that the Gentiles had received the gift of the Holy Spirit. This meant that God had accepted them. These Gentiles were saved; they were Christians. The Jews had always understood that God was the God of the Israelites. If any Gentile wanted to become a believer in God, he had to become a Jewish proselyte. Here were Gentiles who had not become Jews and yet had received the Holy Spirit. God had cut across the old covenant to them, and had given them the blessings of the Gospel. This was so obvious that Peter went ahead and baptized them.

But this caused repercussions "back home." Peter had done something which in that day and time was socially not done. He had gone into the home of a Gentile. "The apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God" (Acts 11:1). Gentiles had not only heard the Gospel, but they received it, and God had received them. "And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem [when he came back home from the house of Cornelius], they that were of the circumcision [the Jews] contended with him" (Acts 11:2). They argued with him; they criticized him, for he had done something he was not supposed to do, "Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them" (Acts 11:3).

"But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them" (Acts 11:4). He explained it step by step.

I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me. Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. But I said, Not so,

Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. [I keep the rules and regulations and I am not going to eat anything that is forbidden.] But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. [If God hath cleansed it, you are not to call it unclean.] And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven. And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting (Acts 11:5-12). (p.104)

You might say, "What would he doubt?" He would doubt whether he ought to go to the house of a Gentile, or with these strangers. "Moreover these six brethren accompanied me" (Acts 11:12). Peter was very wise. Since he was going to do something irregular, he took six men with him.

Suppose a preacher goes into a saloon to seek a certain man. Maybe someone in the community would misunderstand if the preacher went in alone. But if he took two or three of his elders with him as witnesses, they would not misunderstand.

Just because a man is right does not mean he can do what he pleases. Good intentions are not enough; appearances have to be good also. Especially is this true for the Christian. Peter took six brethren with him and entered into the man's house. That was a wonderful way of protecting himself from mistaken criticism.

Should a Christian do what he thinks is right, or should a Christian do the way the people think is right? Should one pay any attention to what we sometimes call the social conventions? We have a social convention, for example, that a young couple in the teen-age group should not go out together without a chaperon; should we keep that up or should the two young Christian people, because they are Christians, feel that since the Lord is with them, they do not need a chaperon?

In that day a Jew was not to go into the house of a Gentile. There was to be no social intercourse. Since the early Christians were all Jews, if they kept this up, the Gospel would never have reached the Gentiles. According to custom, Peter would not have been free to go into the house of Cornelius, since Cornelius was a Gentile. But the Holy Spirit moved Peter to go.

The church at home in Jerusalem called Peter to task for this. So Peter explained. "And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning [as on the day of Pentecost]. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us [because obviously the Holy Spirit fell on the people in the house of Cornelius, just the way He came down on the day of Pentecost], who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I that I could withstand God?" (Acts 11:15-17).

Then we read this sentence: "When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). They did not criticize Peter any further and they glorified God, (p.105) giving Him praise and thanks. In that simple way, the early church opened its heart and changed its mind, as the Lord led.

This is the way in which Christians should deal with tradition. Social customs and conventions usually grow up in times of actual need. It is the rule that people follow. When the custom started, there probably was a real need for it and it served a useful purpose. But social customs do not change with the circumstances, and it sometimes happens that we keep on acting in certain ways that one time were meaningful, but which have no meaning any more.

That is the way it was with Peter. First of all, Peter showed a deference to the feelings of other people. That is why he took six men along. He wanted them as witnesses. He wanted them to be able to say that he had not acted carelessly. Peter respected the opinion of the other people of the community; if he

was now going to break a custom, he wanted to be able to give assurance to everyone else that he was not carelessly flaunting public opinion.

Some people would resent any questioning, but Peter did not. He seemed to imply that they had a perfect right to ask him why he had done this. And it was his responsibility to give them an answer that would satisfy them. He had not gone willfully on this errand for his Lord. He had gone because he was led of God to go.

Peter did not condemn former generations for holding to this custom. He did not begin a campaign to remove the rule that kept Jews out of Gentile homes. He did not ignore the sensitivity of Jewish people, who for a long time had kept this convention because they wanted to keep the Jewish culture clear of Gentile contamination.

Christians would generally be wise if they studied this incident regarding how to act when dealing with social customs. We ought to act in such a way as not to offend people. "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God" (I Corinthians 10:32). If we must act differently from the way other people think we should act, we ought to be able to give a satisfactory explanation of our conduct. Take to heart the lesson here so clearly set forth regarding our conduct when confronted with old and established social customs. (p.106)

CHAPTER NINE

(Acts 11:19-12:25)

"Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only" (Acts 11:19).

As we studied chapter eight, we found that there was great persecution against the churches at Jerusalem, and Christians were scattered abroad through the regions of Judaea and Samaria. But they preached the Word to none but the Jews. The proclamation of the Christian Gospel started among the Jews. The Lord Jesus Himself was a Jew, all the disciples were Jews, and all the early Christians were Jews. Not until the tenth chapter of the Book of the Acts was a Gentile given the gospel witness.

"And some of them [some of these people who were scattered abroad] were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. [Apparently this would mean the Gentile Greeks.] And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord" (Acts 11:20, 21). The preaching of the Gospel is not just a matter of giving information, it is the presenting of a call -- a call to believe. When they believed, they not only accepted information, they also obeyed a call. That is part of what is involved in believing.

Those of us who preach and teach should stop and think, for it is more than just information we are going to share. The Gospel is more than a set of ideas to drill into the minds of those who listen. The Gospel is a call to the heart to respond to an exercise of faith. This faith is given to the believer in God. When the Gospel is preached in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, God Himself is present and by His Holy Spirit He empowers and strengthens willing souls.

"Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch" (Acts 11:22). (p.107)

When Philip went down to Samaria and the church of Jerusalem heard that many of the Samaritans had turned to the Lord, the Jerusalem church sent Peter and John to Samaria to make sure that these people had received the Holy Spirit. The mother church was always interested in this important matter, that a person, having accepted Christ, should receive further instruction as to how to live in Him.

"Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord" (Acts 11:23). How would he "see the grace of God"? By the changed lives of the people who had turned to the Lord. When a man turns from this world to the Lord Jesus, that is the action of the grace of God in his heart. So when Barnabas came down and saw that people were actually turned to the Lord, he was glad indeed. Sometimes we have trouble being glad when we hear of the results of someone else's teaching and preaching. When Barnabas saw what others had done, he was glad because it meant that souls were being turned to the Lord. "He exhorted them all." Exhorting is encouraging, strengthening, stimulating, trying to cheer them up and cheer them on. "That with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." Purpose of heart means that they would do it deliberately; "cleave unto the Lord" is the way a wife cleaves to her husband. They would really take Him as their own and would daily walk with Him.

"For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord" (Acts 11:24). What a wonderful tribute to Barnabas! Many people were brought to the Lord under his ministry. He was anxious they should become real Christians. When you begin your Christian life it is a good deal like setting out a plant in a garden: the plant needs to be watered, protected and helped

so that it will grow into a strong, sturdy plant. And that is what Barnabas wanted. As a result of his manner of life, "much people was added unto the Lord."

"Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul" (Acts 11:25). Why did he want to do that? Barnabas was busy in Antioch. Many members had been added to the church and Barnabas was sent to Antioch to teach what it means to live like Christians. Then off he went to the city of Tarsus to find Saul. "And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people" (Acts 11:26). That was why he sent for Saul.

He wanted these people to be taught well. These were Greek Gentiles. Saul was a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin. Though he had (p.108) been brought up in Jewish customs and beliefs, his home town was Tarsus, a Greek city. Since he had been raised and had lived with Greek people, he understood Greek customs. This was why Barnabas went to get Saul. After Saul had met the Lord on the road to Damascus and had been stricken blind, he went into the city of Damascus. There Ananias baptized him, and his eyes were opened. For a while he stayed in Damascus preaching Christ, living with the disciples and proving that Jesus is the very Christ.

Then he came to Jerusalem. Everyone was afraid of him there, because he used to persecute the church so much. They were afraid that he was pretending to be a Christian when he wasn't, and they did not quite know what to do. But Barnabas took him under his wing. Barnabas sponsored him and presented him to the group. Now Barnabas had the job of training these young converts in true Christian living. It dawned on him that Saul was the man for the job. He went to Tarsus, found him and brought him back to Antioch. So Saul was brought into the work in this fashion.

"It came to pass that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people." There is far more to the Christian Gospel than a person can absorb in one message, or even in a week of messages. In other words, Christians need to hear the Gospel over and over again; that is the way true learning takes place. It is "here a little, there a little, line upon line, precept upon precept," word after word after word. That is how one comes to believe and how one comes to understand.

Sometimes I meet people who say they are not able to believe the Gospel. Though they have the outline of the Gospel in their mind, they just can't believe it. So I ask them, "Are you listening to preaching about it?" Oftentimes the feeling is "I don't need to, because I know what it is." They know what it is in so many words; but not always do they know what those words mean. Naturally, when Saul and Barnabas taught day after day, week after week, month after month, for a whole year and many times said the same things, that does not mean they said them in the same way. It wasn't as if they had memorized their material by rote. Barnabas and Saul were undertaking to get that congregation thoroughly grounded in Christian faith and experience, and Saul stayed there a whole year. Just think of the most outstanding evangelist you know and think of what it would mean if you could have that very man in your church for a year. Large crowds of people came to listen, because Paul's teaching was not only interesting, it was dynamic.

"And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts 11:26). That word *Christian* was given to them as a nickname. The (p.109) word CHRISTIAN has nine letters, the first six letters of which are CHRIST. This is a significant way of indicating what a Christian is. Apart from Christ, we are nothing. Christ is the central and the major portion of our life. When you are wondering whether or not a man is a Christian, the first consideration is not what kind of social customs does he observe, or what his previous record has been, or what his culture is. The first consideration is, In whom does he believe? Apparently the teaching of Paul was so centered on Christ that people nicknamed him that way. They

nicknamed these people as the Christ-people because they were talking about Christ all the time.

If a girl's name is Jane Smith, how can she become Mrs. John Brown? There is one simple way and it happens every day. When Jane Smith marries John Brown, she becomes Mrs. John Brown. As Mrs. John Brown, she is the same girl she was as Jane Smith, but now she has a different relationship, with different responsibilities. So with the Christian. The Christian is a man who is related to Christ. That is the whole story. If a man is not related to Christ, he is not a Christian.

"And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch." There was so much talk about Christ, so much talk about believing in Christ, so much talk about living in Christ, and walking in Christ, and serving Christ, that the neighbors just nicknamed them Christ-people, Christians.

A few years ago, I had the privilege of visiting the mission work in Brazil. I discovered that in one section of Brazil the Protestant converts are called "Bibles." This is the nickname that the community gives them. All the Protestants down there are called "believers," but in one section of Brazil, they are called "Bibles." These people were found with the Bible so much that the people just nicknamed them "Bibles." So it was with these disciples at Antioch. They were so much interested in the Lord Jesus Christ that people just nicknamed them Christians.

"And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world [he predicted that there would be great famine]: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples [these disciples in Antioch], every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 11:27-30). Until now almost everything that had been sent, had been sent from Jerusalem. Jerusalem had transported the Gospel to the people in the world. Here are the Christians in the world responding (p.110) by sending money back to the mother church to help the people in their time of distress.

When those believers in Antioch became grounded in their Christian faith, they developed the same characteristics as were developed in Jerusalem. When the news came that people in Jerusalem were short of food on account of the great drought, this church took up an offering and sent it to the saints at Jerusalem.

"Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church" (Acts 12:1). "Vex" means to bring trouble upon the Christians, to take them as prisoners, arrest them, and persecute them. "And he killed James the brother of John with the sword" (Acts 12:2). Nothing is told about the conditions under which the martyrdom happened, or what kind of testimony James had given. We only know that James was killed.

"And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)" (Acts 12:3). Opposition was developing against the church, and Herod the king, sensing that opposition, began to persecute the Christian in order to draw favor to himself. He found that the killing of James pleased the Jews, so he arrested Peter.

"And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people" (Acts 12:4). He set up a military guard to guard Peter in the prison and make sure he would stay there. Four companies of soldiers were detailed to keep this man, intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. We all accept Easter as a great Christian day or season. Easter is a day that we thoroughly appreciate because it lays emphasis upon the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. But originally Easter was a Roman holiday. This word comes from the Roman calendar, and Herod was determined to bring Peter, a Christian,

to the people on a Roman holiday.

"Peter therefore was kept in prison; but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him" (Acts 12:5). Peter was in prison waiting for the time when he would be taken out to be killed, "but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." Why prayer? I very much question that the early church spent the time in prayer asking that Peter should be delivered. James had not been delivered, and the chances are that James was probably just as popular as Peter was. If the king had killed James, there was no reason why he would not kill Peter.

The Lord Jesus had told Peter by what death he would glorify the Lord and the gospel of John indicates that it would be a death by (p.111) crucifixion. I think the early Christian disciples knew that Peter was slated for martyrdom. As the early church gathered together for prayer without ceasing unto God for Peter, I doubt if they were asking for Peter's release. I think they were praying for Peter's strength, and for his quietness of mind and heart. Peter was about to go through a severe trial. So prayer was made "unceasingly of the church unto God for him." They were praying that his faith would not fail; that the Lord would stay by him in his hour of trial and keep him true to the word that he had professed.

The Lord Jesus Himself told Peter "Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not" (Luke 22:31, 32). The members of that church were praying that if the time did come that he was to pay for his faith with his life, he would do so readily, trusting in God, commending his spirit to the care of God, just the way the Lord Jesus Himself had done.

Perhaps you know someone whose health is failing and you see it appears that he will die. That is a good time to pray for him. Pray that God will give him strength to die in strength, going forward into the very presence of God. We should pray for people who have failures in business and failures in their plans; not that they should get rich, nor successful, but rather that God would comfort them and give them wisdom and strength.

"And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison" (Acts 12:6). So far, everything is according to the regulations. That is the way you would keep a condemned man, one who is going to be brought out to be put to death. "And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision" (Acts 12:7-9). Peter could not believe it, he thought he was dreaming. "When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord" (Acts 12:10).

If you try to water down this passage or to change it, you might as well take it out. And if you take this story out, what other stories will you take out? How much of the Bible will you take out? But if you leave it in, then what? When you leave it in, this world (p.112) isn't what it looks like. This world is not limited to the material things that you can see and handle. God is real. God is alive. God is able.

There is no description of "the angel of the Lord." We do not know whether he looked like a man; we do not know whether he used Peter's language out loud, if Peter heard it with his ears, or in his heart. You do not need to imagine that an angelic being with wings came to the prison. But a messenger from God did come! He spoke to Peter in a way that Peter understood; he followed the messenger and thus came out through the first and the second ward. They came to the "iron gate which leadeth unto the city, which opened to them of his own accord ... and forthwith the angel departed from him" (Acts 12:10).

How? We do not know. Apparently, the angel simply disappeared.

"And when Peter was come to himself [you might say he pinched himself, to see if it was true!], he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews" (Acts 12:11).

Peter knew now that he was going to be spared from the death Herod had planned. Apparently up until this time he had not been sure. When Peter was in prison he did not know he was going to escape. All that night while those people were praying for him, Peter had no idea the prison doors were going to open, to let him out.

And here is an important lesson for us. If we are walking with the Lord, we still do not know everything in His plan. You know in whom you believe, but you do not know in which way God is going to lead. But as you move on day by day, walking by faith and not by sight, you will reach a certain point along the road from whence you can look back and say, "Now I know of a surety." In this case, when Peter had gotten out on the street, and a whole block away from the jail, then he said to himself, "I guess it really is true!"

"And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying" (Acts 12:12). He went to the believers, so that he might share the news with them.

"And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel' (Acts 12:13-15). They had supposed he was already dead, and that Peter had come back as a ghost. (p.113)

"But Peter continued knocking" (Acts 12:16). Such a statement brings one down very firmly to earth. There was no denying that steady knock, knock, knock at the gateway. And it is so with us today. We can say with the Psalmist, "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" (Psalm 27:13). Look around you, my friend, and notice how the Lord deals with you, keeping your eyes and ears wide open. God may show you something, or you may hear something, or there will be someone knocking at the door, that will bring you sharply into focus, and you will find out that God is faithfully taking care of you.

"And when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished" (Acts 12:16). I can just picture how they would have wanted him to come into the house, and join with them in a great celebration. "But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren" (Acts 12:17).

This James is not the brother of John. This is another James who may well have been the brother of the Lord. Many people think that this is the man who wrote the Book of James; James, the brother of John, who was killed by Herod, would not have had time to write the Book of James. "And he departed, and went into another place. Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death" (Acts 12:17-19). It so infuriated him to think that Peter was gone. "And he [Peter] went down from Judaea to Caesarea and there abode" (Acts 12:19).

Go back again and notice verse 5, "Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." They knew that Peter was in trouble, and they trusted God. So they brought their beloved friend and fellow servant into the presence of God in prayer. God handled the

rest of it. The whole church joined together for prayer. We often miss the joy and blessing of such experiences in our own church life. The only time many of our own church members get together is for preaching services. To listen to the Word of God is, of course, fundamental, but God's people are missing this great opportunity to have the blessing of God come upon them in answer to prayer. It would be a wonderful thing if the church would gather together during the week in one home or another home to pray. "Prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." "Without ceasing" means they did not quit. They prayed and studied the promises of (p.114) God. They prayed and talked to each other about these things; but they kept praying.

"And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him" (Acts 12:20). This has to do with local politics. Herod was unhappy with his people who lived around Tyre and Sidon and because of this they felt that they might lose out on his political favors. So they came with one accord to him. They all wanted to curry favor with him. "And, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country" (Acts 12:20). Economically speaking, it was helpful to keep their province on good terms with the central government, which was in a position to help them financially.

"And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne and made an oration unto them" (Acts 12:21). When it says "upon a set day," it means an announced holiday. Herod was all dressed up for the occasion, with all his gold braid, medals and things like that. Then he set himself up to make a big speech to the people.

"And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man" (Acts 12:22). They were moved in their enthusiasm, all seeking his favor. When they all got together, they were ready to make a god out of him. In the history of the Roman Empire, there was a tendency to count the emperor as something more than human. "And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost" (Acts 12:23). Suddenly, he died. Perhaps some sort of infection set in suddenly on him. Men are mortal. They die and they stay dead, no matter how big they are, no matter how great they are. People become great and their reputation is known all over the world. Yet one fate happens to them all. They die. Whether it is Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, or even Roosevelt, Churchill or Hoover, one after another, the inevitable happens and they all die. No matter how Herod vaunted himself, no matter how he persecuted the Christians, there came a time when God took him out of this world. This was the Herod who killed James, the brother of John, with the sword. This was the Herod who put Peter in prison and intended to kill him. This was the Herod who commanded that the keepers should be put to death. But he could not prolong his own life, not one moment. God had the last word.

God is still in control. Anyone who in some way interferes with Christian people has God to deal with, because God has His eye on (p.115) His children. Herod is a symbol. At the very peak of his earthly pomp, God cut him down.

"But the word of God grew and multiplied" (Acts 12:24). The Bible is like seed put in the heart and it will grow and multiply, just as if you put a handful of wheat in the ground and let it grow.

"And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark" (Acts 12:25). You remember that the church at Antioch had sent an offering to "the brethren which dwelt in Judaea" and they did so "by the hands of Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 11:29,30). And now we find these two men returning to Antioch, bringing with them a relative of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10) who later became the author of the gospel of Mark. (p.116)

CHAPTER TEN

(Acts 13:1 - 14:28)

In chapter 13 we come to the beginning of the foreign missionary effort. "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul" (Acts 13:1).

The word *prophet* is much like the word *preacher*. When the Bible speaks of prophets and teachers, it is like saying preachers and teachers. The first one named is Barnabas and the last is Saul. The three in the middle are each given some special identification.

"As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted . . ." (Acts 13:2). Do you think of a Christian church as ministering to the Lord? Christian people minister to the Lord by praising Him. They thank Him for what He has done. They minister to the Lord by being obedient to Him. Such ministry to the Lord includes their worship and their praying, and their ministry of kindness and comfort to other people.

The idea of fasting is strange to many of us. Normally speaking, fasting is an interruption of a usual procedure, such as eating and drinking, doing without that for a time so that you can concentrate upon the things of God. Most people think that fasting means going without food. It was a custom in Bible times that when a man wanted to draw nigh unto God in a special way, he would go without food. This practice would not only release his body for the mental activity involved in worshiping God, but also it would serve notice on himself that he was putting something else first.

"The Holy Ghost said" to them (Acts 13:2). This does not mean that on one given day they were having special services and the Holy Spirit spoke to them. It did not necessarily happen that way. As they took time to seek the face of God in devotion and in personal prayer, "the Holy Ghost said." I am not sure that these words came audibly. I do not know how the Holy Spirit brought this message. But He did, and they knew it was from Him. "Separate me Barnabas (p.117) and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13:2). As these people spent time in prayer and in fellowship in the Spirit, this guidance from the Holy Spirit grew in their hearts.

"And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:3). They considered it, thought about it, and prayed about it. Maybe weeks went by, but they continued to feel this was the thing to do. From the time a man feels the call to go to the mission field and he goes, it is usually much longer than from one afternoon to the next morning. "They laid their hands on them," is another expression that we do not often use, although we practice it to a certain extent in our ordination services. But I wonder, whether we actually have a practical grasp as to what this might mean. When certain members of the church "laid their hands on them" these men became authorized representatives of the church to go and preach the message which the church believed. The church authorized these men to represent them as they went forth, and sent them on their way. This is the beginning of the foreign missionary movement.

We may well wonder whether our own congregation would be in a position to receive this kind of guidance from the Holy Spirit. With reference to this missionary work that was to be undertaken, the message was to the church and not to any individual. The message specifically named certain men. The church came to the conclusion that Paul and Barnabas were to do certain work and the message called for the church actually to send these men.

The selection of the men was the prerogative of the Holy Spirit. It was not because Barnabas and Saul

asked for the privilege of going. It was not because they thought that would be a good way to exercise themselves in the Lord's work. We do not know what they thought, but we do know that it was the Holy Spirit's idea that these were the men who should go. Their selection was the prerogative of the Holy Spirit, but the selection was actually expressed through the church. The church took the spiritual initiative. They fasted and prayed. They authorized them to go. They laid their hands upon them, and sent them out. Certainly this is highly significant for an understanding of missionary activities.

"So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus" (Acts 13:4). The members of the early church, in their fellowship together in the Lord, felt that Barnabas and Saul were the men that should go. Here is further emphasis on the fact this was not their own idea. This was something conveyed to them by the Holy Spirit. Barnabas and Saul were sent forth by the Holy Spirit. (p.118)

"And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister" (Acts 13:5). The message of the missionaries was the Word of God. They shared with other people what God wanted men to do. They also had John as their minister. This is John Mark, the author of the second gospel. just as Simon Peter had two names, so this man had two names, John Mark. We commonly speak of him as Mark, but he was also spoken of as John. When it says, "they had also John to their minister," this is an old English way of saying that they had John as a servant. He was an assistant.

"When they had gone through the isle [that is the isle of Cyprus] unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus" (Acts 13:6). The fact that he was a Jew would mean that they could talk with him. The fact that he was a false prophet means that he was not true to the Word of God. The fact that he was a sorcerer means that he was dealing with evil spirits. His name was Bar Jesus. The prefix bar means "son" and Jesus is the same as Joshua. "Joshua" in the Old Testament is "Jesus" in the New Testament. In New Testament times Jesus was not an unusual name. Many people were called by that name, just as people today are called Joshua. So the name Bar-jesus means "the son of Joshua."

"Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man [a wise and thoughtful man]; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God" (Acts 13:7). Sergius Paulus did not know what the Word of God would be, but he wanted to hear Barnabas and Saul. "But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) [Bar-jesus is also called Elymas] withstood them [he opposed them], seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith" (Acts 13:8). He tried to keep Sergius Paulus from believing.

Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) [this is the first time that the name of Paul is offered in place of Saul. Saul the Pharisee has now become Paul the Apostle] filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtilty [subtlety is cleverness, devious ideas were in his mind] and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? [Aren't you going to stop twisting the truth, Elymas?] And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord (Acts 13:9-12). (p.119)

After Paul made this statement and the man went blind, the deputy was really astonished, especially to find that so much power was associated with the faith that was in Christ Jesus. Barnabas and Saul came into that community to preach and the deputy Sergius Paulus desired to hear the Word of God. Then came opposition. Elymas the sorcerer withstood them. If there are people who come together to

hear the Word of God, there will be people who will oppose them. It was not Paul's argument that convinced the deputy; it was the power of his message. So it is today. It isn't so much the argument that is effective as the effect that it has -- the actual change the Gospel makes in people.

"Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos . . ." (Acts 13:13). When they started out from Antioch, it was Barnabas and his people. But after the miracle at Cyprus, Paul moved to the foreground. "Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem." When they left Paphos, instead of going home, they came to Perga in Pamphylia, which meant they went further on. But John Mark returned to Jerusalem. We have no way of knowing the particular circumstances which caused him to do this.

"But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down" (Acts 13:14). Here is another city named Antioch. This is a different Antioch from the one mentioned in verse 1. The cities have the same name, but are in two different locations. This is Antioch in Pisidia.

"And went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down" (Acts 13:14). The synagogue was the meeting place of the Jews. The Sabbath day was the day of worship. Apparently Paul and Barnabas took their place in the congregation like any other visitors would do. "And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on" (Acts 13:15). This was a customary procedure. After the reading of the law (which is the first five books of the Bible) and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue asked Paul and Barnabas to speak. When anyone was asked to do it, he could take any part of the Scripture that had been read, and share some thought with the people. That is what they called on Paul to do.

"Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience" (Acts 13:16). When he is speaking of "men of Israel, and ye that fear God," that does (p.120) not mean two different groups of people. He is referring to men of Israel who worship and reverence God. "The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it" (Acts 13:17). Paul refers to the early experience of Israel, when "they dwelt as strangers" in Egypt. But God, with a display of great power, brought them out of it. "And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness" (Acts 13:18). For forty years God put up with their bad manners. They grumbled repeatedly. They were disobedient many times. Even though God chastened them and sent messages to correct them, He put up with their many mistakes.

As Paul approached the Jews and as he talked to them in the synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia, he knew, as Jews, they accepted the Old Testament Scriptures. That meant that Paul would preach here as he would not preach in many other places. The Jews believed that God had actually given a covenant to them, and that in terms of that covenant, God would bless them. So Paul reminded them how God took them from the land of Egypt in order to bring them into the land of Canaan. "And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he divided their land to them by lot" (Acts 13:19). The expression, "seven nations", can very well be understood to mean all the inhabitants of Canaan. God destroyed all the nations in the land of Canaan.

"And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet" (Acts 13:20). In one sentence Paul commented on 450 years of history. In that 450 years, which we call the period of the judges, the children of Israel were blessed by the ministry and the service of each individual judge. In verse 19, we saw He gave them the land. In verse 20, we see He gave them

judges. "And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years" (Acts 33:21). Remember that God gave them a king at their request.

"And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will. Of this man's seed hath God, according to his promise, raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus" (Acts 13:22, 23). God promised David that of his seed there would be one sitting upon his throne forever and ever and that that one should be the King of kings and the Lord of lords; that all the nations of the world and all the kingdoms of the earth should become subject to the rule of (p.121) this son of David. In his sermon Paul claimed that God not only gave them David, He gave them of this man's seed, Jesus.

In the next verses, Paul referred to the ministry of John the Baptist. "When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose" (Acts 13:24, 25).

Thus Paul had rapidly reviewed their history to show that God's hand was upon them for good all the way along and that every significant aspect of their history had been by the direct action of God. "Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. For they that dwell at Jerusalem and their rulers, because they knew him not [that is, Jesus of Nazareth], nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, [the voices of the prophets would have supported Jesus Christ in His ministry] they have fulfilled them in condemning him" (Acts 13:26, 27). They have carried out the Old Testament predictions that Israel would reject the truth when it was brought to them, and that they would reject the messengers of God when they came. They did this with Jesus of Nazareth, who Himself was a prophet of God, in addition to being the Messiah.

"And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they of Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre" (Acts 13:28, 29). The children of Israel had killed the Messiah. God gave them the land of Canaan. God gave them the judges to rule over them. He gave them a king, Saul. Afterward He gave them another king, David, and then in keeping with His promise, He had now given this Son of David to them. But they had crucified Him.

"But God raised him from the dead" (Acts 13:30). Then he referred to the reality of the resurrection: "And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people" (Acts 13:31). Paul told these people that many persons saw Him after He was raised from the dead and could testify it was really true. "And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again" (Acts 13:32, 33). All those promises that have to do with God's constant care and watch over His people were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. "As it is also written in the second psalm, Thou (p.122) art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption" (Acts 13:33-37).

This Lord Jesus Christ, now raised from the dead, in the presence of God, has given His Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit was available to anyone who would receive Him. The same God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, the same God who brought them across the desert, the same God who took them into the land of Canaan and watched over them all through these years, was now ready to give them the Holy Spirit. All through history God has initiated good will, grace and mercy toward them.. Every time God undertook to do something, the people needed to respond. Paul confronted them again with the necessity of personal response.

"Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38, 39). You can have the blessing of God. You can have the life of God in your soul.

"Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you" (Acts 13:40, 41). This was an Old Testament prophecy and Paul said, "Be careful that it doesn't happen to you right now." The Bible tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ "came unto his own and his own received him not." All of us have to be careful not to fulfill that Scripture, because if you ignore the Lord Jesus Christ, you put yourself into the group of those who do not receive Him.

The children of Israel were in danger of missing their great opportunity. The Lord Jesus Christ was able to do for them everything that God had promised, but it would require on their part one thing; they needed to believe and yield to Him in order to have the blessing of God upon them.

"And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. (p.123) And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God" (Acts 13:42-44). The word had gone out that these men would now preach to the Gentiles.

"But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy" (Acts 13:45). Immediately my heart becomes sad. How often this happens! These Jewish people thought that they were the only ones who were entitled to the truth of God. But Paul opened the door for anyone to come in, and the Jews did not appreciate it. "When the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming" (Acts 13:45). They were not really opposed to what Paul was preaching. They just did not want to see Paul so popular. They did not want to see him gain such a hold upon the people.

"Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). If people will not listen, there is no reason for you to continue talking to them. Paul and Barnabas declared, ". . . so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47).

"And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). The Gentiles were glad that the Gospel was going to be preached to them. As many as actually took this seriously in a spiritual way, found that they were reconciled to God and received from Him eternal life. "And the word of the Lord was published through-

out all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts" (Acts 13:49, 50). So we read that "they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 13:51, 52). God really does want to bless one and all of us through Christ Jesus, but if we do not come to Him, we cannot receive God's blessing.

"And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed" (Acts 14:1). Barnabas and Paul now had come to the city of Iconium.

"They went both together." Your Bible reading will be stronger when you can do it together. Your praying will be stronger when (p.124) you can do it together. Your witnessing to other people, is always stronger when you have two or more people together. When our Lord Jesus sent His disciples out, He sent them out "two by two." Certainly, each one of us must have his own personal relationship with the Lord. But when it comes to outward activity, it is good to work together with people. So Barnabas and Paul went both together into the synagogue of the Jews.

Why did they go to the synagogue? They certainly knew more about the things of the Gospel than the people in the synagogue did. Did the people in the synagogue believe the things that Barnabas and Paul believed? No. Did Barnabas and Paul go in there to disrupt the meeting? No, not necessarily. Then why did they go there? They went to share the Gospel. They wanted to tell other people about God. In order to tell other people about God, they had to go where people were interested in the things of God. People are normally interested in the things of God in places of worship. If you were going to try and reach any Jewish person in regard to spiritual things, you would go to the synagogue. If you were going to reach any Methodist about spiritual things, you would go to the Methodist church. If you wanted to reach any Baptist about spiritual things, you would go to the Baptist church. It was not done superficially nor deceitfully. In that synagogue they could worship God.

Suppose you belong to a church, and you frankly feel that the people in that church do not fully appreciate the Gospel. You could still go there to worship. Suppose you belonged to a Sunday school class and you are sure that the people in it do not understand the Gospel. Perhaps the teacher does not teach the Gospel. Your heart is hungry to hear the things of the Lord, but when you go there you do not get that kind of teaching. Now, the question is, would you go there? It would depend on what you had in mind. Do you think you might have any chance at all to win any of those people? You have a far better hope in helping them if you go with them to their place of worship. That is what Barnabas and Paul did. "They went both together into the synagogue of the Jews and so spake that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed."

Notice that little adverb *so*. They *so* spake that a great multitude believed. It was an effectual way of speaking. They must have spoken persuasively, cordially, kindly and honestly. They must have spoken reasonably and open-heartedly so that other people listening to them would join them. If I were to go into a Sunday school class and felt that there were people in it who did not believe what I believed, and I were to get up and start out by saying, "Now you folks are all wrong," can you imagine how far I would get? Suppose I (p.125) were to start criticizing their church, their preacher, and their teaching; do you think that they would be inclined to accept what I was giving? Barnabas and Paul discussed these things in such a way that a great multitude, both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.

"But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren" (Acts 14:2). Who are these unbelieving Jews? They believed the Old Testament. They believed in

Moses, Isaiah, Daniel and Jonah. They believed the Old Testament, but they did not believe in Jesus Christ. They had not accepted the idea that God sent Jesus Christ to save their souls. They had not accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour. "These people stirred up the Gentiles." The Gentiles were complete strangers to the whole Gospel; "and made their minds evil affected against the brethren." These unbelieving Jews gave the apostles a bad name in the community.

"Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands" (Acts 14:3). In spite of opposition and prejudice against them, they continued preaching their message and God endorsed it. He had brought things to pass. "But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles" (Acts 14:4). If the Gospel is preached in faithfulness, there will be results and there will be opposition. Part held with the Jews, part with the apostles. Such a division cannot be helped.

"And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: And there they preached the gospel" (Acts 14:5-7). When open conflict seemed imminent, these evangelists withdrew. They would continue to teach, knowing they were being criticized. They would be bold in the work that they were doing, but they kept an eye on the situation. When the time of open conflict came, they withdrew. This is what we would call a strategic withdrawal. Barnabas and Saul fled, but they were not going to quit. They withdrew from that position, but they were not giving up the battle. It is not necessary to win every point. There were other places to preach, and they were not going to waste themselves in an unnecessary fight.

"And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: the same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving (p.126) that he had faith to be healed, Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked" (Acts 14:8-10). This is a little different from what we have heard before, because here the man himself has faith. Yet I also observe this: that Paul saw him and saw that he had faith to receive the blessing of God. We too should be watching for signs of acceptance on the part of those who are listening to our preaching and teaching.

Believing is not simply agreeing that something is historically true. Believing has to do with accepting from God the grace that you did not have. This man was ready and Paul saw that he was ready; and he called on him to respond, to receive. In our preaching and teaching of the Gospel we should look to see whether there are people ready to respond, give them a chance to respond, and expect them to respond.

"When the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Morcurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people" (Acts 14:11-13). The public thought that Paul and Barnabas were gods themselves. In this enthusiasm of popular acclaim something was fundamentally wrong. There was an error in their thinking. It is strange that people who cannot believe in God can yet credit man with superhuman ability. They offered public esteem, even worship, to Barnabas and Paul. The natural man seems to be able to accept anything but the truth, even to making gods out of Paul and Barnabas.

"Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes" (Acts 14:14). They tore their clothes because they were so distressed. "And ran in among the people, crying out and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all

things that are therein: Who in times past suffered all nations, to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them" (Acts 14:14-18). What was the concern of Barnabas and Paul? Why were they so anxious to correct this view that the public held? The important thing was that they were grief-stricken at the mistake the people were (p.127) making. It was a mistake to give man the honor that belongs to God. These people were not seeing the hand of God at work in their midst.

In chapter 13, when he was talking in Antioch Paul argued from Scripture, and the whole discussion is a long interpretation of the prophecy of the Old Testament. But these people in Lystra did not know the prophecies of the Old Testament, so Paul did not quote the Bible at all, for they would not know what it meant. He appealed to nature, and he reminded them that the God who gives them rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, is the real God. Barnabas and Saul were not giving them any fruitful seasons.

The goodness of God seen in nature was a valid basis on which people could come to God, and it is true to this day. When you deal with people about God, sometimes quoting Scripture is no real help because they do not believe the Bible anyway. As a matter of fact, they do not even know what it says, so how can they possibly believe it? Sometimes you have to talk on the level of their knowledge. They know the things of nature, and you can approach them in that way. There is more that is true than what is in nature, but it can be used as a beginning for an understanding of the Gospel.

"And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them" (Acts 14:18). It was all Barnabas and Paul could do to keep the people from making gods out of them. "And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people [they criticized Barnabas and Paul and spread slander about them], and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead" (Acts 14:19). That is a brief, simple record, just a single sentence, to tell of what must have been a terrible experience. The aroused mob took Paul, whom they had wanted to make a god and stoned him. Then they dragged him out of the city, as if he were a dead body. For anyone who in any way seeks to spread the Gospel, this is a forceful lesson. One day you are praised, the next day you are blamed. One day they lift you up and make a god out of you and the next day they knock you down and would not wipe their shoes on you. The public is fickle!

"Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe" (Acts 14:20). Another simple statement. There is no story about how he felt, no expression of resentment on his part, nothing like that at all. Instead, "the disciples stood round about him." That is a wonderful thing, for they supported him and strengthened him.

Do you remember the battle between Israel and Amalek in (p.128) Exodus 17? Amalek was so strong he would have defeated Joshua if Moses had not prayed. But Moses held up his hands in prayer and as long as he held up his hands, Joshua was winning. But when he got tired and would have dropped his hands, Aaron and Hur stepped up beside Moses and strengthened him. Your pastor needs that kind of support. He needs people to stand beside him and strengthen him.

"And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:21, 22). These disciples went on their way home, retracing their steps, calling at the cities where they had been, calling the converts together, and preaching to them.

What do we mean when we talk about a soul being confirmed? We mean that the soul is reassured and strengthened in its conviction. You believe in God and commit yourself to God. Then someone comes

and preaches the same thing that you have heard; this confirms your soul, it makes the soul more firm in its faith. Paul and Barnabas gave them reassurance about their faith, "exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." For the human being to enter into close fellowship with God will involve much tribulation. If I am going to turn myself over to the Lord Jesus Christ, I must deny myself. I must say "no" to myself, I must make myself do things that I do not want to do. Being in the kingdom of God means I am subject to God. He is the king of my heart and my soul. The human nature in us will suffer when we want to walk in the ways of God. That is what Paul and Barnabas were teaching these people.

"And when they had ordained them elders in every church . . . (Acts 14:23). They helped these young Christians select certain individuals to whom would be given responsibility of oversight over the others. Not every Christian has the same understanding of spiritual things. Because that is so, they commit into the hands of some who are more experienced and more mature, the responsibility of watching over the younger Christians. These people were called elders. "And had prayed with fasting." Undoubtedly, they prayed that those elders would be blessed.

"They commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed" (Acts 14:23). After all, Barnabas and Saul could not stay there. But when they left them, "they commended them [the elders] to the Lord Jesus Christ on whom they believed." He was the source (p.129) of their confidence. "And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia: and thence sailed to Antioch" (Acts 14:24-26).

These are all strange names to us, but I want to pick up this phrase, "when they had preached the word in Perga." What would that word be? What is that message? Do you know what the word of God is to you? God gave His Son for you. Put your trust in Him and He will forgive you your sins. He will regenerate you and make you a new person. He will put His Holy Spirit in you, so that you will never be alone again. That is the Word of God. This is what they preached in Perga.

"And thence [they] sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled" (Acts 14:26). They returned to the home church in Antioch which had sent them out as missionaries. "And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27). They had a big homecoming. All the congregation came together and listened to the stories that Barnabas and Saul had to tell. They told how God opened the hearts of people and turned them to believe. "And there they abode long time with the disciples" (Acts 14:28). (p.130)

CHAPTER ELEVEN

(ACTS 15:1-35)

"And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). This happened at Antioch, which was some distance from Jerusalem. The church at Jerusalem was the mother church. From there certain disciples went and preached in Antioch, where a large number of Gentiles believed. So it was understood that Gentiles could become Christians. When the word came that a large number of Gentiles became Christians in Antioch, the church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to make sure that they understood the Gospel properly. After Barnabas had seen what Antioch was like, he sent for Saul of Tarsus to come and teach. For over a year, Saul and Barnabas taught the members of that new church. From there the first missionaries, Barnabas and Saul, had gone out. They had had a long and effective missionary journey, and had come back and told the church at Antioch all the wonderful things which God had done.

But then certain men came down from Judaea. They came into the congregation and began to teach, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." Circumcision was a ceremony belonging to the Jewish community. These Gentiles who became Christians had not been circumcised. These men of Judaea came and said that if they did not submit to this particular ceremony, they could not be saved. That caused a disturbance. It cast a reflection upon the experience of these Gentiles. It also cast a reflection on the work of Barnabas and Saul. "When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them . . ." (Acts 15:2). "Dissension" means difference of opinion. "Disputation" means argument. "They determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question" (Acts 15:2). (p.131)

Do you think that Paul needed to go anywhere to learn the truth of the Gospel? The Book of Galatians will tell you that Paul did not confer with any man when it came to understanding the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Himself showed him the truth of the Gospel. He had spent three years in Arabia before he had begun teaching in Antioch. Certainly Paul would not need to turn to anyone to get an idea as to what the truth was. Barnabas was one of the old veterans from the church in Jerusalem itself. He was at one time, you might say, their most trusted minister. They had sent him from Jerusalem down to Antioch to make sure that that church understood the Gospel.

These were the two outstanding leaders. Do you not think they could have argued those other men down? And do you not suppose that in a long-drawn-out argument and controversy, they would have won? But notice what happened. Paul and Barnabas decided to go up to Jerusalem to get the matter settled. They could have argued it out as some of us are inclined to do. But that will hurt a church. Paul and Barnabas wanted to get it settled in a way that would be above question, so that there would not be any prolonged ill will over the decision that was made. So they went up to Jerusalem.

"And being brought on their way by the church [they had their expenses paid by the church], they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles" (Acts 15:3). They were going up to Jerusalem to have an argument settled. But when they were passing through the country what were they talking about? Their argument? No. They were talking about the conversion of the Gentiles, the wonderful success of the Gospel. "And they caused great joy unto all the brethren" (Acts 15:3). It should make the members of any church happy to hear that others have come to believe. "And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them" (Acts 15:4). They did not come with banners waving

because they were on one side of the argument. They came talking about what God had done.

"But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15:5). There were those who persisted in bringing up this issue. "And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter" (Acts 15:6). These Pharisees did believe. They were Christians, but they were wrong. It is possible to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ even though you do not have real understanding of the truth. (p.132)

The early church had a big issue before them. Some Christians said that Gentiles, who had not been brought up in the faith of God, could become Christians simply because Christ Jesus died for them. On the other hand, some Jewish Christians who had been ceremonially circumcised as a sign that they truly belonged to God believed that Gentiles had to be circumcised to become real Christians. Could Gentiles become Christians without first becoming Jews? Barnabas and Saul said, "Yes." Other people came down from Jerusalem and they said, "No."

"The apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them [of course, they would have great respect for Peter, because he was one of the leading apostles], Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago, God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe" (Acts 15:6, 7). In chapter 10 you will recall that Peter preached the Gospel to Cornelius, and Cornelius, who was a Gentile, believed. "And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us" (Acts 15:8). He would not have given the Holy Ghost to them if they had not believed. God had endorsed their faith by giving them the Holy Spirit, the same as He had done to the Jews. God made no difference between those in the household of Cornelius and the Jews who lived in Jerusalem. He had received them both.

"Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" (Acts 15:10). Why do you now want to put these young Christians under the yoke of regulations since they are already accepted of the Lord? "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they" (Acts 15:11).

Peter ordinarily was on the side of those people who kept the Jewish ways. In the Book of Galatians, we find that Paul had to withstand Peter on one occasion on this matter, but here Peter stood up and spoke on the other side. Why? Because he knew this was the truth. This is a remarkable case of faithfulness to God. "Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul" (Acts 15:12). They have not said anything until now, but now they were speaking, "declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them" (Acts 15:12). Taking the cue from Peter, who had suggested that God had blessed Cornelius even though he was not circumcised, Barnabas and Paul (p.133) got up and told all the things which God had done among the Gentiles through them.

In verse 13, we have a third line of testimony. We have had the personal testimony of Peter: "God showed me." We had the testimony of Barnabas and Saul: "God endorsed our preaching among the Gentiles and confirmed their faith with great signs and wonders." Now in verse 13, we have a new line of testimony. "After they [Barnabas and Saul] had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon [Peter] hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things" (Acts 15:13-17).

So James told them that the Old Testament Scriptures promised that the time would come when the Gentiles would believe. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18). If God had said that through the prophet, years and years before, it is not strange that such a situation should arise now.

"Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them [let us not place any burden on them], which from among the Gentiles are turned to God. But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood" (Acts 15:19, 20). In other words, as Christians, they must not go in the way of the world, but they must live without participation in heathen practices. Gentiles do not have to become Jews. They do not have to accept the ceremony of circumcision. All they must do is to abstain from pollutions of idols, live separated lives, be morally pure as is befitting a Christian, and abstain from things strangled and from blood, so that they cause not offense to other people. "For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day" (Acts 15:21). We do not need to be sorry that they are not paying attention to Moses, said James. After all, the Jewish people are continuing to follow his words, for Moses is read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

So they reached a decision. The first argument was that Peter said, "I was shown that this was the way to do it, and God endorsed what I did."

Barnabas and Paul next said that out on the mission field God had endorsed this procedure. They had preached to the Gentiles who (p.134) did not know the law of Moses, but they had turned to God and God had worked wonders among them.

Then James got up and said, "And the Scriptures of the Old Testament affirmed that the time would come when the Gentiles would believe."

So they added all these things up: personal testimony from Peter, the general report of Barnabas and Paul from the field and the Scriptural teaching which James gave them. All of this made it possible for them to agree that the Gentiles could become Christians without first becoming Jews. However, they should not live like the Gentiles. They should be careful in their conduct.

If you have ever been with a group that has been all torn up because of an argument, and a peaceful solution has been found for the trouble, you will know what relief really is. If you find the church all divided by dissension, you will know what distress is. You will know that as long as church members argue, they will not work. When they find a way of settling their differences, your heart and theirs can be at peace. This is what happened in the early church.

"Then pleased it the apostles and elders with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren" (Acts 15:22). We can expect that in the course of any debate, we may not have complete agreement. We may never get to the place where our judgment is unanimous, but our action can be. I may agree to work with a man whose ideas are not my ideas. We might disagree on some things, but we both believe that the sinner needs to be saved, so we work together.

This is the case here. When these people made a decision, it was with one accord. They all agreed to make this decision. This does not mean that they all agreed that the Pharisees were wrong. That is not the point. They all agreed on this solution. They decided to send important men of their own company down to Antioch from the church in Jerusalem. Can you recognize the importance of that? That is doing honor to the young church at Antioch. They sent the most important men they had to Antioch to explain what the mother church in Jerusalem had decided to do.

They wrote a letter for them to take so there would be no questions about it. The letter said, "The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting (p.135) your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 15:23-26).

Some men from Jerusalem had troubled them with words. It was not what they did. It was what they said. "Subverting your souls" means disturbing you, upsetting you. "To whom we gave no such commandment." They were not authorized to say those things. But since they did it, "it seemed good unto us, being assembled with . . . beloved Barnabas and Paul." Notice how they referred to Barnabas and Paul, "Our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us" (Acts 15:27, 28). How would you know what seemed good to the Holy Ghost? In prayer. They had gathered together in prayer and meditation to reach this decision. "For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication; from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well" (Acts 15:29). It was a kindly, considerate and comforting message courteously given to these people who had reason to think that someone was questioning their spiritual experience. "A soft answer turneth away wrath." Courtesy is always helpful.

"So when they were dismissed they came to Antioch [Barnabas, Paul, Judas and Silas came to Antioch]: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation" (Acts 15:30, 31). This church in Antioch rejoiced in the good will which the church at Jerusalem showed toward them.

"And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them" (Acts 15:32). To "confirm" is to make something solid, to make it strong. "And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles" (Acts 15:33). They stayed for awhile preaching in that community and then they went home. "Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still" (Acts 15:34). Judas and Silas were the two men who went down from Jerusalem and perhaps there were others along with them. In any case when the time came to go home, Silas did not go. He stayed in Antioch (p.136) mingling with these people where he had doubtless found a fresh grasp of the things of the Lord.

"Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also" (Acts 15:35). The Word of the Lord primarily reveals to the human heart what God will do for you, what God will do in you, and what God will do through you. (p.137)

CHAPTER TWELVE

(Acts 15:36 -16:40)

At the end of the fifteenth chapter Paul and Barnabas came to a point of disagreement. It was over the matter of taking John Mark with them on their second missionary journey. "Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought it not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other; and so Barnabas took Mark and sailed unto Cyprus" (Acts 15:37-39).

Was it a quarrel? I am not sure. It was certainly a difference of opinion. Do we need to think this was a mistake? No, I would not be so quick to say there was a right or a wrong about this. Barnabas showed what a wonderful man he was in that he gave Mark a second chance. On the other hand, Paul was the great evangelist, going out into absolutely new territory. He was going to head inward into the mainland of Asia Minor and it would be difficult to say what he would encounter. He came into much more difficult situations in the second journey than he had faced in the first one. Quite possibly Paul reasoned that if Mark could not go with them on the first, he would not be ready to go with them on the second.

There was no difference between these two men and the way they felt about the Lord. The difference was in the matter of their personal procedure. Instead of prolonging their disagreement, they separated. "Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God" (Acts 15:40). The disagreement was so strong that they separated and went separate ways. But when they went, the church as a whole commended them to the grace of God. They did not carry over any argument into their separation at that point.

"Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus (Greek for Timothy), the son of (p.138) a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek" (Acts 16:1-3). This is how Timothy became one of Paul's company of evangelists. Paul reached out, as it were, and called this young man Timothy. He said he wanted him to come with him and help him.

Timothy's mother was a Jewess, who believed in the Lord, "but his father was a Greek." Then we come to this very interesting statement. Paul "took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters." Now because his mother was a Jewess, it would have been proper to have done this, but because his father was a Greek, it had not been done. In a sense there was something irregular about the way in which this young boy had been brought up. Paul took him and performed this ceremony of circumcision on him in order that the Jews would have no criticism to offer. Circumcision was not necessary for the spiritual experience. Paul knew that well. You do not have to be circumcised in order to have fellowship with God. In the Book of Galatians, it is just as clear as language can make it that circumcision would relieve the apostolic company from the criticism and opposition of the Jews, who would be offended if Timothy went into religious work without being properly circumcised.

If Paul had thought that anyone considered circumcision necessary to being saved, he would not have done it. Later on in the Book of the Acts when the people insisted that he circumcise Titus, he would not do it. Should one do this kind of thing just to please people? Yes, Paul respected local sensibilities; that is an important thing for a Christian witness to do. We do not advance the Gospel in any way at all

by making people mad.

"Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium." Timothy had a good reputation among the Christians. We gather definite ideas about Timothy's spiritual state from other portions of Scripture. Later, Paul writing to Timothy says, "Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy" (II Timothy 1:4). Paul was greatly impressed by his tears. Timothy, evidently, was a man who put his heart into what he was doing. He could be deeply moved. This was no cold, intellectual understanding that Timothy had. It was a heartfelt relationship with the Lord. Timothy was a tender-hearted, whole-hearted young man.

"When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, (p.139) which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also" (II Timothy 1:5). The English word *unfeigned* is a little unusual. It means without pretense. Paul remembered this young man's faith was straightforward. You would call him genuine or real.

Apparently in this family, the grandmother Lois was the first one to accept Christ. The mother Eunice was next and then Timothy also. And the faith that was in Timothy, Paul recognized as being the faith that was in the grandmother and the mother. "And I am persuaded that in thee also." This word *persuaded* means that Paul looked at the evidence, and he was convinced that this young man was a genuine, real believer.

"And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily" (Acts 16:4, 5). What decrees? The decrees "that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem." In chapter 15 you will remember the church council at Jerusalem discussed whether or not Gentiles had to become Jews before they could become Christians. After the matter was settled, the church wrote a letter which was to be taken to all the Gentile churches. The church at home wanted them to be careful about certain things in their conduct, but circumcision was not required. Now those were the decrees which Paul and his company delivered to the people. The result was that the churches were established in the faith and increased in number daily.

Do you not think that Paul could have preached straight from his own heart and his knowledge of the Gospel? Do you not think that Paul could have solved the problem those decrees were supposed to solve? But what did he do? He "delivered unto them the decrees that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem." There is a strength shared in the common witness, when all the people agreed on a certain formal accepted statement. This is the reason for our creeds, for our standards. When we have a creed or a confession, we agree on a statement of faith. The reason it is so strong is that it comes from the church as a whole, and is not the work of an individual.

Any denomination to which you belong has certain statements of doctrine. No matter how they word these, no matter how they are phrased, these doctrinal statements will show Christian unity in that group or denomination.

It is not incumbent upon us to follow every voice we hear. As a matter of fact, many voices we hear are not true. That is one (p.140) of the reasons why we need a creed. The creed is a sort of testing device. If the man is speaking according to the creed, we will accept what he says as true. If he is not speaking according to the creed, we will know that he is not in line with our way of thinking and we can treat him accordingly.

Back at the beginning of the Protestant church, the Reformers repudiated the authority of the clergy who were controlling the church. And when they repudiated the clergy as not being infallible, they said that the Bible was the only infallible guide and rule in matters of faith and practice. When they had repu-

diated the authority of the clergy, they still were faced with this problem: how would the verdicts of authority be known? And so they set out certain statements. In Switzerland they prepared the Helvetic Confession. The Lutheran church agreed on the Augsburg Confession. The Episcopalian or Anglican Church had the Thirty-nine Articles. The British Isles collaborated in turning out the Westminster Confession of Faith, which has become the confession in many churches even down to this day. This all occurred in one period of church history after the church had repudiated the clergy as being the infallible guide and rule. This whole process somewhat resembles a ball game. You have an umpire, but the umpire is only supposed to apply the rules that have been agreed upon by everyone.

"And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily." The churches were made strong and they were securely anchored in their faith by this procedure. Again, what was that procedure? Paul, Silas and Timothy set out before the people the decrees that the elders and the leaders in Jerusalem had presented.

"Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them" (Acts 16:6-10).

All of those strange names mean very little to many of us, but now for the first time the Gospel was going to Europe. Up until then the Gospel had always been in Asia. Now the Gospel was carried across the straits of Bosphorus, probably the sea of Hellespont, into the country called Macedonia, which was in Greece. (p.141)

At this point an important event occurred. And it developed out of a common problem which we face continually. How can I know what God wants me to do? Does God want me to go this way or that way? Does He want me to take this job or that job? Does He want me to talk to this man or to that man? Does God want me to spend my money here or to give my money there? This is the important problem of being guided by the Lord. The text says that they were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the Word in Asia. That means Asia Minor, the country we call Turkey. Now how would they be forbidden of the Holy Ghost? Would you expect that they would hear a voice that would tell them? Doubtless these men took time to pray to God about what they were going to do, and to wait on God for what we call "guidance." They meditated on the problem before God. They were inwardly led, their own thoughts took shape in such a way that they felt inwardly they should not go into Asia Minor. They had no liberty to go on, so they turned.

"After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia." That is what they planned. It seemed to them that there was a part of the country that could be benefited by hearing the Gospel preached, so they made their plans to go. "But the Spirit suffered them not." When they reviewed their whole plans before God in prayer, they had no liberty in the Spirit to go and preach where they had planned to go. Now both of these verses indicate that the Holy Spirit exercised the prerogative of control. Paul and Silas tried to decide which way to go, but before they acted they waited on God in prayer. They made two starts and were stopped both times.

"A vision appeared to Paul in the night." It came to a man who was studying this problem, who was carrying it on his mind and heart, and who had tried to do this and do that. Before we get guidance that will make a matter clear, it may well be that the Lord will lead us through a period of time when we will

have frustrating uncertainty and our praying will not seem to bring us to any really clear conclusion.

Here you have a perplexed, frustrated group, searching the mind of the Lord for guidance. Being in the will of God does not mean that you will always know everything that you should do. If at any time you feel uncertain about what to do, that is no indication you have been doing the wrong thing. That does not mean that you are on the wrong road. It may well be that the Lord wants you now to look in a direction you have never looked before. Maybe that is the reason why all the doors seem to be closed. (p.142)

When these people were not allowed to go into Asia, they did not go. When they were not permitted to go into Bithynia, they did not go. They just waited there in Troas in a state of indecision to see what would happen. Then, in a vision or dream, Paul saw this man in Macedonia. Apparently they had not thought about Macedonia. That was in another country altogether, on another continent. "And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them." "Assuredly gathering" means that they came to the definite conclusion that the Lord called them to preach the Gospel over into Macedonia. Now Paul had the vision, but they all had the conviction. They accepted it as they prayed, for it seemed right. It is as though when they held this before the Lord, something inside of them clicked and said, "That is it." They weighed the evidence, everything seemed to point that way, and they "assuredly gathered" that the Lord called them to preach over there. Now in such a situation as that, they learned the will of God.

"Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samotracia, and the next day to Neapolis; and from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days" (Acts 16: 11, 12). Paul moved along to the chief city, the most important place, the central place of influence. Since it was a colony, Roman citizens were there.

As you remember, at that time the city of Rome controlled the whole known world. The Mediterranean Sea and all the countries around its borders were under Roman control, including the land of Greece. As this Roman government extended its authority all over the known world, it would send out Roman citizens to settle in some of these captured lands. Wherever a group of Roman citizens settled, it was called a colony. Philippi, the chief city of Macedonia, was a colony. Thus Paul went to the most important city when he started preaching the Gospel in that territory.

During the days they were there, they were probably studying the city and trying to become oriented in that area. They did not immediately start public services.

"And on the Sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither" (Acts 16:13). The Sabbath day was the time. The Jewish people believed in God and respected the Sabbath day. The place was the prayer meeting spot where prayer was usually offered. At the right time and at the right place, they went with their message. (p.143)

Some people feel that if we have the Gospel in our heart and mind and we have any kind of an opportunity at all, we ought to go ahead and tell the whole story right then and there. But wait! Even if we do have the Gospel, and we are under orders from God and God alone, that does not mean that God does not want us to use good sense. When God is directing you, He sends you out at the right time and place. We read also that they "sat down and spake unto the women which resorted thither." God also led them to speak to the best people. What people? The people who came down there to worship, the people who were already inclined to hear the Gospel.

There is a temptation not to care what people think. We know that the Lord called us to preach, so we are going to preach. If you are doing what the Lord wants you to do, and you are serving Him as He wants you to serve Him, you will be considerate of what people will think. It does not mean they are

right, but it means that they are fellow human beings, who have feelings of their own. It means that you can win more people by making friends of them than my making enemies of them. You can catch more flies with sugar than you can with vinegar.

Whenever I have an opportunity to go fishing, I find out the bait the fish want, and put that bait out. You do not put out the bait that looks attractive to you. You put out what you think the fish want. A mother who is a fisher for the Lord will use every artful way to get her children to think about the things of God graciously, kindly, gently, gladly, willingly. Some parents get impatient with their children and tell them what to do in an atmosphere of tension and conflict. If you are telling them to do the will of God, you should tell it in God's way. It may be necessary to differ with your children, but doing the will of God does not mean that you could not be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves."

There were seven days in the week, but they waited for the Sabbath day, the day when people paid attention to the things of God. There were more people at the market place, but they went down to the river side "where prayer was wont to be made." And there they "spake unto the women which resorted thither."

"And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us" (Acts 16:14). Even before they started preaching, God had been working on the hearts and minds of those people. The first woman they won in Philippi was Lydia, a woman who worshiped God. She was already inclined to do the will of God.

At first she listened as a complete stranger, but after she had been (p.144) persuaded that they were telling the truth, she came to them, and they baptized her. This was a public ceremony of identification, in which they indicated that she was now one of those who believed. "When she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us" (Acts 16:15).

There is an example of immediate participation in the ways of the Lord. The moment a Christian has found the new joy of heart, there is a desire to share or to help.

"It came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying" (Acts 16:16). After they had come to stay in the home of Lydia, and they were going on with their preaching in the same place of prayer, this "certain damsel, possessed with the spirit of divination met us." A spirit of divination apparently meant the capability of foretelling the future, clairvoyance, or something along that line. Her masters, who had her under contract collected the fees for her services; this poor girl was being used to make money for them.

"The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation" (Acts 16:17). She followed them through the streets, and everything she was saying was true, but her conduct was unusual, and she attracted an attention that was not wholesome. "And this did she many days" (Acts 16:18). By doing this, she actually hindered the work of the Gospel. Paul and his company wanted to teach the people, but this young woman following them and crying out in a loud voice, was a distracting influence.

"But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour" (Acts 16:18). Paul apparently knew that this woman was under the control of an evil spirit, and when upon his use of the name of Jesus, the spirit responded to the command by coming out, she was cured "the same hour."

"And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs which are not lawful for us to receive,

neither to observe, being Romans" (Acts 16:19-21). Her masters soon found out that the girl had no longer the capacity of "second sight" and they could not make any more money out of her. What they really objected to was that change in the heart and life of this girl because Paul, in Jesus name, had (p.145) commanded the evil spirit to leave her. Set free from that spirit of soothsaying, she had removed her masters' hope of gain. So they forced Paul and Silas to appear before the magistrates and accused them of disturbing the peace of the city.

"The multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks" (Acts 16:22-24).

Here were Paul and Silas thrown into prison because of grave opposition against them, and this happened because they had preached the Gospel. They were beaten, they were thrown into the inner prison and they had their feet made fast in stocks. They could not have any comfort or rest at all.

"And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them" (Acts 16:25). Though they had received rough treatment, yet here at midnight instead of moaning, whining, or cursing, Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises to God. They had been viciously persecuted and afflicted. Their backs were sore where they had been beaten with many lashes. Yet they did not spend their time complaining against the government, or against the soldiers. They were praying and praising God. "And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened" (Acts 16:26). The whole building was so shaken by the force of the earthquake that the locks gave way and the doors swung open, "And every one's bands were loosed" (Acts 16:26). All these planks that had been nailed and fastened down to hold them in the stocks were shaken in such a way that everyone was free.

"And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled" (Acts 16:27). In those days a jailor was responsible for the keeping of his prisoners. That was the way the government had of making sure that he would not let them go out of sympathy. If they gave him a prisoner to keep in prison and he let that prisoner escape, he had to go to prison. If that prisoner was under sentence of death, then the jailor would be killed instead. When the jailor thought of all these prisoners escaping, he just could not face it, and he drew his sword intending to kill himself.

"But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and (p.146) came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:28-30). Paul and Silas had an opportunity to run away, but they did not try to escape. He could not understand them at all.

No one could have planned this whole affair. First of all, the crowd mobbed Paul and Silas. Then the authorities beat them, and threw them into prison. Who could expect that at midnight, while Paul and Silas were singing praises to God, an earthquake would come and shake the whole place up in such a way that every door was opened, and these stocks in which their feet were put were broken loose so that every prisoner would be free? And who would expect every prisoner to stay where he was?

The result of it was that this Philippian jailor asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:30, 31).

What does it mean to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ"? Does it mean to believe *about* the Lord Jesus Christ? Yes, you would have to know about the Lord Jesus Christ in order to believe *on* the Lord Jesus Christ. Believing *about* anything is knowing what it is and knowing what it is supposed to do. Believing

on it is actually committing yourself to it. For instance, I might believe something about the medicine a doctor has prescribed, but I am not believing in the medicine unless I take the medicine into me. I might believe statistics about a bridge. I could believe it was 125 feet long, 50 feet wide, 30 feet high in the middle. All of these things could be measured and I could say that I believe those facts about the bridge. But to believe on the bridge means I drive my car over it.

To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you have to believe something about the Lord Jesus Christ. You should, for instance, believe that He came into this world to seek and to save the lost. Also that He was taken as a man, arrested and brought to trial, and then was taken out and crucified. These things actually happened. You would have to believe that He was raised from the dead and that He showed Himself alive by many infallible proofs; and that forty days after He was raised from the dead, He ascended into heaven, and that He is now at the right hand of God. All of these are things that you would need to believe about Him, if you were going to believe on Him.

If you are going to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ you should believe that He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. You should know that it really is His promise that He will plan to save those who put their trust in Him. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). If you are going to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you need to (p.147) believe that He came to save you through His own suffering for you. You also need to have in mind the truth of His provision for us. He not only came to die for you, but He sent the Holy Spirit of God, to dwell in your heart.

These are some of the things that you should believe about the Lord Jesus. But you could believe about those things and not believe *on* Him. You must commit yourself to Him. You must yield yourself to Him.

What do we really mean when we talk about a person being saved? Many times the word is used by some people to indicate that you belong to a church, or that you have had a particular spiritual experience. Maybe you were overcome with emotion and afterward you said, "I was saved." Is that the meaning of this word?

Certainly above everything else, to be saved means that, a man is forgiven, that he is pardoned. If a person had no sense of sin he would not have any feeling about being saved. But if he realizes he has done things he ought not to have done; and that he is not acceptable before God, he will feel the need of forgiveness. If he believes on the, Lord Jesus Christ, he will be forgiven. His sins will be taken away. The Bible says "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12).

When the Bible says "Thou shalt be saved," one thing it means is "Thou shalt be saved from future punishment." When a person is saved, he is completely forgiven.

Being "saved" also means that you are born again. You experience a new birth. That does not mean you have another chance, it means you become a different person. You are different from the inside out. Before, you were a child of man, born of your parents. But when you are born again, you became a child of God.

Being saved also means "to be healed." You have a sense of being delivered from sin, set free from hurtful habits, all patterns of thought and behavior that are evil. Your whole personality will be healed when you are saved by the grace of God that is in Christ Jesus.

The things about your own personality that were not right are actually being changed. But something else follows. God gives you His Holy Spirit. When a person is saved, it is not as though you have gotten off the track and the Lord Jesus came along and put you back on the road and said, "Now go ahead and

do the best you can." You are not set back where you were before to do it all over again. He said to His disciples, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16, 17). We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God who takes the things of the Lord Jesus Christ and shows them (p.148) unto us. The Holy Spirit will make you conscious of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, and this makes possible a fellowship with Him, a companionship with Him. The Lord Jesus Christ will be closer to you than the other people in your family. If there are two of you in a room, there never will be only two, there will be three, because the Lord Jesus will be there.

When you are saved, you also are given a different outlook for the future. The average person dreads the day when life will come to an end. He may try to turn his back on it, but he knows with a sinking heart that his days on this earth are numbered and that death will come. How about the Christian? Does he not die? The flesh dies. The outward physical being dies, but the new thing that is in him will never die. Even though he falls asleep in Christ Jesus, he will be raised from the dead. To the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is spoken these wonderful words: "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).

In the latter part of Acts 16:31 is this remarkable addition, "and thy house." This is both exciting and thought-provoking. The faith that is in the parents will show up in the children, and the lack of faith that is in the parents will show up in the children. The real obedience to God that is in the hearts of parents will show up in the children, and the failure to obey God that is in the hearts of parents will show up in the children. The children will talk like their parents, they will walk like their parents, and they will act like their parents. As long as they are children, they will believe like their parents.

I do not know of any greater reason for a father and mother to attend church regularly, to be found in Sunday school, to be reading the Bible, to be exercising themselves in prayer than this -- that your children will do just exactly what you do. If you are a person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, they will be inclined to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you believe in the reality of God, they will be inclined to believe in the reality of God. If you believe that God will forgive sins, they will believe that God will forgive sins.

"And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house" (Acts 16:32).

What is the Word of the Lord? When our Lord Jesus Christ was with the woman of Samaria at the well, He said, "Ask of me and (p.149) I will give you living water." That is the Word of the Lord. And you could tell someone who is thirsty in the spirit that the Lord will satisfy forever.

When the leper came to Him and said, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," He answered, "I will; be thou clean." That is the Word of the Lord. And you could tell someone with guilty feelings that the Lord Jesus Christ will cleanse his soul. Perhaps you are involved in circumstances that are upsetting. It seems as if you are right in the midst of a terrific storm. Do you know what the Word of the Lord is in the midst of the storm? "And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm" (Mark 4:39). "Peace, be still." This is the Word of the Lord!

Do you remember when He met the demon-possessed man? He said, "Hold thy peace, come out." And they came out. That is the Word of the Lord. You could tell someone that the Lord Jesus Christ, by His Holy Spirit, can deliver him from the sins that are binding him now. This is the Word of the Lord.

When the disciples were face to face with a great problem and were wondering what to do, the Lord Jesus said to them, "Have faith in God." When you are wondering about the situations that you are fac-

ing, about some of the problems and some of the burdens that you have, "have faith in God." Sometimes you feel so burdened that you are almost crushed under the weight of it all. "Have faith in God." This is the Word of the Lord.

"And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes" (Acts 16:33). Do you remember the circumstances? I do not know what time it would be, perhaps two or three o'clock in the morning, but in the meantime the Philippian jailor had found the Lord.

After he had yielded himself to God, "he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes." They had been beaten, and whipped; they had bruises all over them. The first thing this man did was to bathe their wounds. There was sympathy and consideration now. Before he had not been interested in service for these people. Now his whole attitude about them changed.

"And was baptized, he and all his, straightway" (Acts 16:33). This matter of being baptized outwardly is an outward sign of an inner experience.

Today baptism is an outward ceremony in which a certain affirmation is made. It is like a wedding ceremony. Remember the last wedding ceremony you attended? The preacher said to the man, "Wilt thou have this woman to be thy lawful wedded wife?" When (p.150) the man said, "I will," do you think there was any question as to what he was going to answer? Then why was the question asked? As a matter of record for it to be shown to the world. This is an open affirmation. The same applies to the baptismal ceremony. It is an open affirmation of your belief.

"And when he had brought them into his house . . ." When this man became a Christian, he not only openly identified himself with their message and was baptized, but he took the preachers to his home. "He set meat before them." He gave them food. "And rejoiced, believing in God with all his house" (Acts 16:34). The whole family rejoiced that their sins were forgiven.

"And when it was day, the magistrates sent the sergeants, saying let those men go" (Acts 16:35). We do not know of a certainty just why the magistrates did this. "And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace. But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out" (Acts 16:36, 37). Paul is saying, "You made an open arrest, now make an open release. You accused us in front of everyone of being disturbers of the peace; now set us free in front of everyone as being innocent of the charge."

"And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city. And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed" (Acts 16:39, 40). In all this experience, Paul and Silas were the strong people. They were the men who had been falsely accused. They were the men who had been mistreated. But when it was all over, they were the strong men who could comfort the others. (p.151)

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

(ACTS 17:1 - 18:18)

Have you ever wondered how missionaries begin preaching and teaching in a new field? What do you think they do? Let us see what Paul did! "Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ" (Acts 17:1-3). This is what one could call the classic approach.

Paul came to the city of Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. A synagogue was a place for public assembly for religious purposes. It was a Jewish education building; the Jewish congregation met there for the purpose of instructing each other in the things of the Lord. As a Jew, Paul joined in with them. For three Sabbath days, Paul "reasoned with them." The Sabbath was the day on which they read the law of God and listened to interpretations of the law of God. They would be in their synagogue services for hours, talking about religious matters.

In these services, Paul "opened and alleged." "Opening" means opening up the meaning of the passage. He would read a sentence and then discuss it with them. "Alleging" is saying that Christ had to suffer. When he was saying this, he was not referring to Jesus of Nazareth. Christ is an Old Testament term referring to the Messiah, God's chosen one. The Old Testament said that one day God would send His chosen representative, His righteous servant, into this world. Paul argued that it also taught that this Messiah should suffer and rise again from the dead. There are passages in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and in all the prophets, that will tell you that the Messiah will one day rule. David was told that a descendant of his would sit on the throne forever.

So Paul argued that according to the Old Testament, this Messiah (p.152) should not only reign, but also suffer. Paul showed that the only way He could suffer unto death and reign forever would be that after He had suffered, He should be raised from the dead. That was implicit in the Old Testament. For example, there was such a passage as: "Thou wilt not suffer thine holy one to see corruption." There are expressions such as. "The Messiah would live forever in his sight." He showed them that this is what the Old Testament Scriptures pointed out.

"And that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ." He pointed out how Jesus of Nazareth suffered unto death, was raised from the dead and had really fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. Why could Paul argue thus in a Jewish synagogue? Because it was all in the Old Testament, and the only truths he taught that were not in the Old Testament were the actual facts of the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

"And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas" (Acts 17:4). Some of those in that Jewish synagogue listened, and said, "That is the truth." They believed that Jesus of Nazareth really was the Christ, the chosen one of God. "And of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few" (Acts 17:5).

"But the Jews which believed not . . ." (Acts 17:5). These also were in the synagogue. They too had the Old Testament Scriptures. But they did not believe that what Paul was interpreting out of the Old Testament was true. They did not believe that Jesus of Nazareth was really the Christ. "The Jews which believed not, moved with envy. . ." (Acts 17:5). Why were they moved with envy? They were moved with envy because Paul was so popular, and people were actually being brought under the power of God through Paul's preaching. Souls were being saved.

These Jews, moved with envy, "took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar" (Acts 17:5). It can be done. A small minority of determined, prejudiced people can arouse sentiment against a whole program. And they did. They aroused people, "set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people" (Acts 17:5). They came to the house where Paul and Silas were staying and tried to bring them out before the people, so that the people might mob them.

"And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also" (Acts 17:6). They accused Paul, Silas, Jason and these other Christians of disturbing the peace, saying they were notorious, having turned the world upside (p.153) down. "Whom Jason hath received" (Acts 17:7). That is what they held against Jason; he had let these men stay in his home. "And these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus" (Acts 17:7). The Jews had no sympathy for the Roman government. But when they wanted to get Christians into trouble, they accused the Christians of preaching against the Roman government, and of being subversive.

"And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things" (Acts 17:8). Paul and Silas couldn't even appear on the street because people were so sensitive. "And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea" (Acts 17:10). Was this because they were cowards? That is a foolish question. Paul was ready to die for the Lord Jesus, but there was no reason why he should die ahead of his time.

"And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews" (Acts 17:10). There was no change in their program. Paul may have slipped out at night, but that did not mean he was going to stop preaching.

You can't always witness to someone every day. If you find a person is unwilling to listen, you would be far better off to keep quiet and talk to someone else.

"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). The word noble is not used the way we commonly use it. It means here that they were more open-minded, more generous and more intelligent than those in Thessalonica. They received the teaching that Paul was giving, "and searched the scriptures daily whether those things were so." You see, the Gospel means much more than the actual facts of life of the Lord Jesus Christ; that He was born in Bethlehem, lived in Palestine, died on Calvary and was raised from the dead. What they wanted to find out was whether the interpretation which Paul gave was the truth. "Many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few" (Acts 17:12). When the door to Thessalonica closed because of quarrel and strife, Paul and Silas humbly and meekly went on to the next city. They found the opportunity to carry on with the Gospel better there than in the city they left.

"But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea" (Acts 17:13, 14). They sent (p.154) Paul out of the city and let everyone think he was going to leave as if he were going by the sea. "But Silas and Timotheus abode there still" (Acts 17:14). Silas and Timothy were probably not popularly known as preachers and did not have to leave. But Paul had to get out because it was his testimony and preaching that was causing the disturbance. "And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed" (Acts 17:15). Again, this was not a matter of running away. This was a strategic withdrawal. Paul moved away from this place where the

opposition was aroused to start working in other places.

"Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry" (Acts 17:16). Today we seldom use that word idolatry. One might think that that has to do with images of stone, or wood, or something like that. Since we do not have those, one might assume that we do not have idols. Nothing could be further from the truth. An idol is anything that you prefer above God. If a man or woman gives anything else first place before God, that is an idol.

"Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him" (Acts 17:17). The Apostle Paul was by no means lowering his flag. He went into the synagogues and reasoned with Jews, and "with the devout persons" or proselytes. These proselytes had joined the Jewish faith but they were not Jewish by birth. ". . . and in the market." In the synagogue he talked with the Jews, but "in the market daily with them that met with him. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him" (Acts 17:18). The Epicureans and the Stoicks represented two schools of thought among the Greeks. The Epicureans had the idea that the greatest good is what enjoyment you get out of life. "Enjoy yourself now; you will be a long time dead," was their philosophy. The Stoicks said you ought to be good for goodness sake. You ought to be good because it is good to be good. They were a sturdy lot of people who were inclined to do the right thing and the moral thing even if they did it in a bitter, tough way.

When the Apostle Paul preached in Athens, he could have been on the campus in any university in this country today. The people had the same frame of mind.

In most cities Paul preached to audiences that were primarily Jewish and thus understood the background of the Gospel. But when Paul came to Athens and faced those Athenians, he was facing human beings who did not have the teaching of the Old Testament. (p.155) They did not know about Moses, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Greeks were among the most educated people the world ever produced, but they did not have the Old Testament Scriptures. Instead, they know much about systems of thought, and about the world, the sun, moon and stars, the plants, the animals. That was the kind of people the Apostle Paul preached to when he was in Athens.

The Apostle Paul was given the opportunity to answer for himself to these people. "Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babler say? [some thought he was just a talker, sort of a crank, a man with queer ideas] other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection" (Acts 17:18). He preached that Jesus of Nazareth was God and that anyone who knew the story of the Lord Jesus Christ knew what God was like. He also preached that the resurrection will lead to the true way of life. The way of living successfully and triumphantly in this world is to face the issues of life and death, die to this world and live in the life that God will give you.

When the people listened to him, they said, "This is a strange thing. I wonder what this man is saying." "And they took him and brought him unto Areopagus" (Acts 17:19). Areopagus was an open forum, a place where all the religions had their shrines. People would go there to hear anything that was being preached. "For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean." You can recognize right away the open-minded university frame of mind.

"(For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)" (Acts 17:21). If that isn't university life, I do not know it. New, new, new, always something new. That is the way it was with these Athenians. It is not necessarily evil, but it certainly is inadequate preparation for facing life.

"Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye

are too superstitious" (Acts 17:22). Actually the Greek should more properly be translated, "I perceive that in all things you are very religious." The people who translated it in the King James Version felt that any kind of religion those people had was superstition. "For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you" (Acts 17:23). Paul is not making fun of them. He was not telling them immediately that they were wrong. This was a wise approach. He took note of the way they were doing (p.156) things, and he found that they were religious. They were interested in the possibility that man could get help from the outside. Paul did not come and tell them, "I have the truth and I am going to show it to you." He came and watched them and he said, "I have noted that you are very religious."

One could very well ask himself, when he comes across people to whom he is going to witness, "Is there any opening that I could use so that I would not antagonize them?" By the way, this is also pedagogically sound: Paul began where they were. In other words, Paul recognized their religious interest, but he did not admit that this religious interest was adequate. He pointed out that it was inadequate. They, themselves, admitted it when they acknowledged an Unknown God.

In getting acquainted with them, Paul found this opening and began to talk. Our missionaries use a similar approach. They get acquainted with people; they find out how they live; they learn their way of doing things, and they find out what their people need. Maybe there is a loneliness, maybe there is an emptiness, maybe there is a grief, maybe there is a burden. Right at that point the missionary offers help. He says, "I will come and tell you about this God that you do not know."

If someone were to ask you, "Who is God?" how would you answer? Suppose you start in by saying, "He is the God of the Bible," and this person tells you, "Well, I never read the Bible; I do not know anything about that." Then what would you say? You would say, "He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." This person says, "I know nothing about them." Then what would you say? You might say that "He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." And this person says, "I do not even believe Jesus Christ ever lived." Then what would you say? How would you tell a person who God is? After all, who is God? This was Paul's problem. Paul was standing on Mars' Hill in the city of Athens, talking to these educated, sophisticated, intellectual pagans and he was going to tell them about God. You might have the same problem when you meet a university man, or when you meet a young child.

"God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not (p.157) far from every one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring" (Acts 17:24-28). It is not a matter of technical terms and philosophical words. Simply put, He is the Creator. Anyone who looks out can see the earth, the sky, the heavens; God made them all! That is who God is.

"Seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands." You do not limit God to any structures that men make. This is true, not only physically, but also socially. You cannot keep God inside the Sunday school and inside the church. He is not even limited to human structures of thought. You cannot keep Him inside what someone says about God. "Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing." Actually, God does not need one single thing from you or me. You and I might need to give Him something for our sakes, but He does not need it for His sake. "Seeing he giveth to all life and breath, and all things." You see, He is the living God. More than that, He

not only gives all things to all men but he "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation." God is in charge of everything on the face of the earth. All the things that happen are under God. He is in control of all. He is sovereign. In everyday language, that means He is boss.

Of course, some will wonder if He is boss why is the world the way it is? Why does he allow what He allows? I have often wondered why. We may not understand Him, but we can know Him and trust Him. This world in which we live is not one hectic hodgepodge. It is under His control, and God is reigning, with His eye upon us. He is our Guide. Many times you may say, "I do not find any satisfaction in living, the way the things are in this old world." You are not supposed to find satisfaction in the way of the world. Some people find nothing but grief in the world. To all I would say, Look up to God, trust in Him, seek His face -- "He has the whole world in His hands!" In this whole message, Paul did not bring up one social problem. He did not discuss ethics or politics. He was talking about God, and man's relationship to God. This is the very essence of faith.

"Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God [God made us], we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device" (Acts 17:29). You and I are more than a stone. You and I are alive, and God holds eternal life in His hands. You and I know the difference between right and wrong, and God gives us power to do what is right and avoid wrong-doing, as we trust Him. We cannot write up some kind of (p.158) scientific formula and say, "That is God." We ought not to think that God is to be conceived in any image of man's mind. He made man. Man did not make Him.

"And the times of this ignorance God winked at [which is a way of saying that God is charitable to people who do not know any better]; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30). He wants people to admit that in themselves they are inadequate and imperfect. Why? So that man will cease to strive in his own power and will turn to God. God wants all men everywhere to let go of themselves and give themselves over to Him. That is the meaning of the word, "repentance."

"Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained" (Acts 17:31). God's settled purpose is to look over the whole world and to look for the righteousness that was in Jesus Christ. In our own human nature, we do not have righteousness. We might as well accept that fact and reckon ourselves before God as being unworthy, repent, judge ourselves and put our trust in Him. "Whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter" (Acts 17: 31, 32).

The idea of the resurrection provoked derision. Why would they oppose it? Resurrection is possible only if you die. If you are not crucified with Christ, you will never be risen with Christ. The self must die so that the life may go on in the Lord Jesus Christ. "So Paul departed from among them" (Acts 17:33). The one person who could have shown them walked away. Why? They had laughed at him. They had mocked him. The Bible says, "God is not mocked." He is not going to put up with that kind of foolishness. "Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed" (Acts 17:34). The big crowd of people may not respond. They may laugh at and criticize the truth of the Gospel, but some will believe. "Certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite [one of the leading men in that place], and a woman named Damaris, and others with them" (Acts 17:34).

"After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth" (Acts 18:1). Paul had been in Athens, and had been preaching on Mars' Hill. He had told the Athenians that God demanded that all men were to come before Him in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. And God demonstrated it by the res-

urrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. They laughed at him and he went away. We learn (p.159) of his approach to Corinth from I Corinthians 2:1, "And I, brethren, when I came to you [after his experience at Athens], came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Paul was now stressing the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. This does not necessarily mean that he had made a mistake in his preaching at Athens, but there he talked about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. All talk about the resurrection and the new life in Christ Jesus will not really touch a person who has not understood that Christ died for them.

When Paul came to Corinth he "found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers" (Acts 18:2, 3). This is how Paul supported himself while he was preaching in Corinth. In a farm community in Canada near my home were some earnest Christian people. Their preacher had a farm of his own. The members of the congregation helped him farm. They would all come over and plow his field for him, or do his thrashing for him, but he still had farming to do. At Corinth Paul supported himself by tentmaking. He did not do that elsewhere. As a matter of fact in the second epistle to the Corinthians, Paul seems to imply that this might have been a weakness in his ministry.

William Carey, the great pioneer missionary to India, would never have been able to stay in India if he had not built a printing press and done printing for the government. He became a public printer and with the money he made from the printing press, he constructed his own missionary program. And so Paul boarded with Aquila and Priscilla, who were Italian Jews, exiled from Rome. When Claudius ruled that all Jews must leave Rome, they had come to Corinth.

"And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks" (Acts 18:4). Paul was continuing his witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. "And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ" (Acts 18:5). The presence of Silas and Timothy inspired Paul to even stronger testimony and witness. It is like that. A man may carry on work by himself and do very well, but if he has someone come and join him, he can do better. Inspired by the presence and the support of Silas and Timothy, (p.160) Paul urged the Jews that Jesus of Nazareth is really the Christ of the Old Testament.

"And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment [that was a gesture to indicate he was through with them, like you shake dust out of clothing], and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6). So Paul definitely turned to the Greeks.

"And he departed thence" (Acts 18:7). That is, he went out from the synagogue. He no longer tried to work with these people who had the Old Testament Scriptures, but who did not want to follow on into the truth of the Gospel. They had the promises in the Old Testament, but when Paul stood before them and showed them the meaning of those things, they opposed him. "He departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God [a man who worshipped God but who was not one of the Jews], whose house joined hard to the synagogue" (Acts 18:7). It was right next to it. There Paul started preaching and teaching. He came out of the synagogue and started a cottage prayer meeting right next to it.

Would not some people say that he was running competition? Would not some people say that he was not recognizing the rights of other religious activities? We need to understand Paul's thinking and his motive here. He considered the people in the synagogue as unwilling to follow the ways of the Lord.

Paul was not going to give in to the superficial, shallow notion that any kind of religion was all right. If the people were teaching things that were in keeping with the truth in the Lord Jesus Christ, they were his brothers. If they were not teaching truly, they were not his brothers.

And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house" (Acts 18:8). While Paul was preaching the Gospel next door in a private house, the chief ruler of the synagogue believed on the Lord with all his house! "And many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). The result of Paul's procedure of coming out of the synagogue and starting work right beside it in a private house was confirmed by the response. God blessed his work, and many people were brought to the Lord.

"Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision" (Acts 18:9). In other cities when opposition developed, Paul left, for he had no pleasure in contention. Quarreling and contention always confuse the issue. But here, while he waited on the Lord and prayed about what he should do in seeking guidance, "Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision." It reminds me of the time that (p.161) Peter had the vision on the housetop about going to Cornelius. This was a change in procedure, enough of a change in the usual way of doing things, as to make special revelation necessary. "Be not afraid." Afraid of what? Afraid of the controversy? Afraid of the opposition? Afraid of the peril? "Be not afraid." Be strong where you are! "But speak, and hold not thy peace" (Acts 18:9). Set forth the true Gospel. Open your mouth in public and preach the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"For I am with thee." I have a feeling that the Lord's statement, "I am with thee," is reserved for people who are obedient. "No man shall set on thee to hurt thee." You need have no fear of suffering loss. "For I have much people in this city" (Acts 18:10). The Lord was going to save many in the city of Corinth. If the Lord is going to save them, why did Paul have to preach? Because that is how the Lord does it. There is no such thing as the Lord saving people apart from the preaching -- somehow -- of the Word. The Lord is telling Paul, "I have many people in this city. You stay right here and preach, so that we can call them." The need is to hear the Gospel. The Lord will save them, but Paul must evangelize them. The evangelistic activity is essential to bring in the Lord's own. And so we read: "And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them" (Acts 18:11).

"And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat" (Acts 18:12). Paul had withdrawn himself from the Jews and had gone with the Gentiles, but the Jews resented Paul's activity in the community and they "made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat." They indicted him as a disturber of the peace, saying, "This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law" (Acts 18:13). As Jews they were privileged to practice their religion. The Roman government permitted this, but the Romans would not permit anyone to teach anything. So the Jews brought Paul into court to show he was not a real Jew and that his preaching and teaching of the Gospel should be outlawed.

"And when Paul was now about to open his mouth [Paul would have defended himself], Gallio [who was the magistrate] said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness [a matter of immoral conduct or something of that nature], O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drave them from the judgment seat" (Acts 18:14-16). He declared that the court had no jurisdiction in this (p.162) matter. Gallio was not going to be involved in an argument over interpretation of matters of religion.

"Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat" (Acts 18:17). The Greeks were on Paul's side. So they turned on the Jewish leaders and beat

them up. But no one seemed to pay any attention. At the end of verse 17 we are told, "Gallio cared for none of those things." There was much trouble, contention and controversy, and still it goes on.

"And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow" (Acts 18:18).

When you get into a quarrel of any kind, there is a great danger that you will become partisan yourself. For instance, if someone will come along and accuse you saying, "You are all wrong," it is a great temptation to turn around and say, "*You* are all wrong." It may not be the truth that either side is all wrong. It is possible to become involved in a great argument over differences of opinion, looking at something from two different points of view, and you can argue and argue, and you would not resolve the differences.

Paul had argued in his preaching of the Gospel that Jewish customs would not save. He had not said that Jewish customs were wrong. He simply said Jewish customs would not save. The Jewish customs are the privilege of the Jews, and being a Jew, he could say that. As a Jew, he was eligible to practice those Jewish customs and we find that Paul actually did practice the Jewish customs.

Many of us would not know what it means to shave ones head because he had a vow. That was a Jewish custom. The Jewish people were inclined on occasion to make a vow before God. A man would shave his head and then he would stay under a certain spiritual prohibition until his hair grew out. I have known of a Jewish man who felt that he had offended God and he shaved his head. As long as his hair had not grown out he would not speak in public about anything pertaining to God. That was a Jewish custom.

Do you think that when Paul shaved his head in a Jewish custom that he thought that would make him a better Christian? I do not think so. Paul understood quite well that his relationship with God was dependent upon the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you remember when he called Timothy to go with him? He had him circumcised "because of the Jews in that quarter." It was a matter of tactics. People had been criticizing Paul for being so much with the Gentiles. They had been saying that he was against the Jews. To prove he was not against the Jews, he acted like a Jew and followed (p.163) a Jewish custom. He was going to Jerusalem. He took Priscilla and Aquila, who were both Jews, with him. Furthermore, he had shaved his head in Cenchrea, for he had a vow; but he did not compromise his Christian testimony.

When I was a young man and first started preaching, I did not like the idea of putting on a robe, and wearing that long robe in the pulpit just did not seem right to me. But the Lord has shown me that if, under certain circumstances, a minister wants to wear a robe, it is perfectly all right. It would not make any difference to me, just so he preaches the Gospel.

Customs do not matter, but the Gospel does. (p.164)

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

(ACTS 18:19 - 20:38)

One of the problems involved in all church work is the difference of opinion that develops among people. Human beings are varied in nature and seldom think alike. Those who do agree tend to get together and form themselves into parties or groups. Then they begin to oppose each other until you have the people who are with the Joneses and the people who are with the Smiths.

"And he came to Ephesus, and left them there [the 'them' would refer to the people he was travelling with]: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews" (Acts 18:19). Paul took care to make sure that people would not be able to label him as being anti-Jewish. Because of what happened at Corinth he could expect to be so labelled. Over the whole country people said he was anti-Jewish and probably sneered at him as a Gentile lover. Had he not turned to the Gentiles? In Corinth, yes. In Corinth he found it advisable to work among the Gentiles, but that did not mean that the Apostle Paul was turning his back on Jewish people. It did not mean that in the future he would not have anything to do with the Jews.

"When they desired him to tarry longer time with them. . ." (Acts 18:20). He must have conducted himself in such a way that those Jews wanted him to stay longer. Apparently Paul was able to disarm their prejudice. That is tremendously important because it shows how, led by the Spirit, a man can seek to avoid being labelled on one side or the other of a controversy. "When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; but bade them farewell" (Acts 18:19, 21). Listen to what he said: "I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem" (Acts 18:21). He was going up to Jerusalem to keep a Jewish feast. Although he was working with the Gentiles, he recognized Jewish customs and principles.

"But I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus. And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, (p.165) and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch" (Acts 18:21, 22). Antioch was their home base.

"And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples" (Acts 18:23). This may well be the beginning of Paul's third missionary journey. Paul's first missionary and second missionary journeys are clear to all students of the Book of the Acts, but the third missionary journey is oftentimes obscure. This is apparently where it begins. He left Antioch, going out over the old route to strengthen the disciples. This is follow-up work.

How would you strengthen believers? You increase their understanding of the Old Testament, for instance, as Paul did in the various epistles, and you help the believer interpret Christ for himself, to come to a better understanding of what the Lord Jesus Christ did for him. You strengthen this believer in confidence, in the validity of the promises of the Gospel as to what the Lord Jesus Christ actually promised, and you increase his understanding of how the Holy Spirit works within.

"And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus" (Acts 18:24). Alexandria was a city in Africa, at the mouth of the Nile river, just on the edge of the Mediterranean. Why was it called Alexandria? Because it was a city built by the Greeks in honor of Alexander the Great. "Apollos" was a Greek name, which indicated that he had been brought up among Gentiles. He was "an eloquent man." This refers to his native gifts. He could make a public address with real power.

Furthermore, he knew what was in the Old Testament. He had studied the Scriptures, and had acquired a mastery of them. What would make a man mighty in the Scriptures? No doubt, he had insight into how to interpret a passage because he knew other passages bearing upon it, and could give you the consensus of all these passages.

"This man was instructed in the way of the Lord" (Acts 18:25). He had some understanding of the way that God would deal with men, and this understanding was beyond his own personal insight. This is not saying he was unusually wise nor clever. Maybe he was, but this is not referring to that. ". . . and being fervent in the spirit . . ." This is a personal trait; it refers to his being zealous. He had a real urgency within him to share what he had with other people. "Being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John" (Acts 18:25). The truth that he knew about the Lord Jesus Christ greatly (p.166) affected his heart and will. He had the Old Testament Scriptures, the preaching of the prophets, the law of Moses, the tabernacle and temple worship that Aaron and his sons had set forth. And then he knew about the special ministry of John the Baptist. John the Baptist pointed out that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ. One of the things that John preached was, "This is he of whom I spake. Behold, the Lamb of God." Doubtless Apollos preached this.

"And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue" (Acts 18:26). What would he be teaching in the synagogue? This man would tell the people that God looked on the heart. It was not enough for a man to bring sacrifices. It was not enough for a man to attend temple worship. It was not enough for a man to come to the synagogue and to share in the reading and the studying of the law of God. Formal religious practices are inadequate. "Whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly" (Acts 18:26). Do you remember Aquila and Priscilla? They were the two Jews with whom Paul lived in Corinth. When Paul left Corinth, he took Priscilla and Aquila along with him to Ephesus.

When Aquila and Priscilla heard this young preacher, they recognized that Apollos did not have the whole Gospel. So "they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." This couple, a layman and his wife, took the young preacher into their home and showed him more truth than what he had. When it says that "they expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly," this is not to say more accurately, but more completely. You might say, "Well, what did he not know?" One thing he did not know was the resurrection. John the Baptist died before the Lord Jesus went to Calvary's cross. And Apollos, who had heard John preach, would not understand the resurrection, the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ into heaven or the coming of the Holy Spirit.

"And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him" (Acts 18:27). In those days preachers were much like our evangelists. They went from church to church preaching the Gospel, interpreting the Scriptures, and teaching the truth. Apollos had come to Ephesus and had talked there. Aquila and Priscilla had told him more about the truth of the Gospel which he had grasped, and now he was disposed to pass into Achaia. But the brethren in Ephesus wrote ahead and encouraged the people in Achaia to receive Apollos. A servant in public life needs the testimony of those who know him. When a man comes in from the outside, he would be a complete stranger to you if he were not, in a sense, certified to you by people in whom you have confidence. (p.167) In our various churches we have ways of doing that. When young men come forward to preach, scarcely anyone would really know who they are or what they would do, so we have schools to train them and examinations for them to pass. Then we have an ordination examination and ceremony in which the church authorizes a certain young man to preach. This is a way of commending him to all the rest of the churches.

"Who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace" (Acts 18:27). Apollos must have been a highly useful preacher. He would help them to enter into this grace wherein we stand.

"For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ" (Acts 18:28). Apollos was a great orator. Publicly, he could handle the Jewish questions and discuss them, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ. This was not by the New Testament records, for they had not been written. This was showing by the Old Testament that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, the Son of the living God.

The Old Testament said that Christ would be born of a virgin, and He was. He was to be born in Bethlehem of Judaea, and He was. He was to be born of the line of David, and He was. In the Old Testament, it was predicted that this Messiah, this Christ, would be a righteous servant of God. That word "righteous" implied "without sin." Apollos would have pointed out that the life of Jesus of Nazareth showed no sin. The Old Testament said that Messiah would perform miracles; that He would heal the sick, open the eyes of the blind, and make the lame to walk. Jesus of Nazareth did all these things. The Old Testament said that Messiah would be gracious to the poor, and would be gentle and considerate. Apollos told them that Jesus of Nazareth was gentle and gracious to the poor. The Old Testament pointed out that Messiah would be offered as a sin offering for His people, and that He would in Himself bear away the sins of His people.

Apollos would preach that the sinner could come to God by the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ on the cross, in the way opened by the Lord Jesus Christ. The Old Testament pointed out that Messiah would rule over His own and He would become the Lord of all. So Apollos would argue that Jesus of Nazareth became the Christ, and would be the King of kings and Lord of all.

These are some of the things that Apollos might have preached publicly and eloquently to prove that Jesus really was the Christ And his preaching convinced the Jews and greatly helped those who had believed through grace. (p.168)

"And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism" (Acts 19:1-3). In chapter 18 we read that Apollos knew "only the baptism of John." You see, if a preacher knows only John the Baptist, that is as far as the people who listen will know. The people in the congregation are not likely to rise higher than the preacher. If the preacher does not understand the Gospel beyond the forgiveness of sins, the people will not understand the Gospel beyond the forgiveness of sins.

Now let us look more closely at this. "Paul came to Ephesus and finding certain disciples." This word "disciple" has no special bearing on a man's inner spiritual condition. A disciple is a learner. He is a person who is an inquirer, who has come to learn.

On the mission field we have people whom we call "inquirers." They are people who have joined classes to study, but they are not yet Christians. However, they are interested enough to come and learn. In other churches, we have communicants' classes. We encourage young people and others, too, to come to these communicant classes and learn what the church teaches in order that they might enter into the full Christian experience.

So these disciples are people who worship God and who are seeking to know the truth. When Paul came into a community, his custom was to seek out the worshipers of God and become associated with

them. "And finding certain disciples, he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Spirit since ye believed?" I often have wondered what lack Paul felt when he met those disciples at Ephesus. What did Paul see about their testimony that attracted his attention to this? You see, you cannot tell by looking at a man on the street whether he has the Holy Spirit. You cannot even tell by looking at a man in church whether he has the Holy Spirit. You can only tell by listening to him, by sharing with him.

How do you receive the Holy Spirit? Receiving the Holy Spirit would be recognizing Him for who He is, the way you receive a guest into your house. You honor Him because of who He is. You give Him the place that belongs to Him. You obey Him. You are willing to let Him guide you and direct you in your ways. Why did Paul ask this? What would he be wondering about? I ask myself, "What would he wonder about me?" Under what circumstances would Paul ever turn around and with wonderment ask, "Say, did you receive (p.169) the Holy Spirit when you believed?" As much as if to say, "You do not talk like it, you do not act like it."

I think when he listened to these disciples, he noticed that they were conscious of sin. John the Baptist was. I think they were probably depressed in their own weakness. They felt guilty because they were such sinners. Perhaps like Job they could have said, "I abhor myself in dust and ashes." That would cause Paul to wonder whether they had received the Holy Spirit. In their talking, he would have missed reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. The work of the Holy Spirit is to take the things of Christ and show them unto me. And if I never talk about Christ, if I just talk about my sins, it means that I have not known that Christ Jesus died for my sins; that God raised Him from the dead and that He is now in the presence of God interceding for me; that He has given His Holy Spirit to me; that His Holy Spirit is in me and now will deliver me from sin in order that I might do the will of God. No matter how they had prayed or sung, I think Paul might have missed their joy. You cannot experience real joy until you know your sins are forgiven. And you will not be sure your sins are forgiven unless the Holy Spirit reminds you of this and shows you the things of the Lord.

If they had no joy, it would be an evidence that the Holy Spirit was not working in them. So he asked them this question. "Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed?" And he got this answer: "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost." That's translated to mean, "We have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." It would be too much to say that they did not know the Holy Spirit is referred to in the Bible. After all, Apollos who was mighty in the Scriptures, knew perfectly well that the Holy Spirit is spoken about in the Old Testament. He would know also that Joel and other prophets had said that God would baptize his people with His Holy Spirit. They knew about that, but did not know that the Holy Spirit had been given. In other words, they did not understand about Pentecost.

This caused Paul to wonder, "Unto what then were ye baptized?" This is a way of asking, "When you openly identified yourself with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, with what did you think you were being involved?" Being baptized is a public indication that you intend to accept the message that has been preached. Being baptized in the Old Testament days was a good deal like a person coming forward and confessing Christ in our day.

In John's time, the ceremony of baptism was basically a public confession of faith. If you believed what he said and you wanted to accept that for yourself, you would go forward and be baptized. (p.170) You were being baptized into the preacher's message. So the Apostle Paul asked these people: "Well, when you were baptized, unto what were you baptized?" "And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus" (Acts 19:3,4). There is something

more than repentance. We must confess and repudiate sin. We must acknowledge before God our iniquity but that is not all. Getting rid of your sin is like taking a kettle in the kitchen and cleaning it. Then what? You do not put it back on the shelf. Why did you wash it? Why did you scour it? Did you not do that because you were going to use it? That is the way God wants to do with you. John truly baptized with the baptism of repentance. But he also preached that the people should believe on the One who was coming after him, Jesus Christ. And he also said, "He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Luke 3:16).

"When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5). They accepted the whole message about Jesus Christ as Lord. They commended themselves to what Jesus Christ had done, looking for the power that Jesus Christ would give them.

"And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied" (Acts 19:6). We are unsure what the full meaning of the "laying on of hands" is. But I think it refers to the commissioning service. Every one of us is to be witnesses, with the word, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," intended for every believer. When they were commissioned to serve as witnesses, "the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve" (Acts 19:6,7).

"He went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months [every Sabbath day], disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8). "Disputing" does not mean arguing in a destructive sense. It means "reasoning," or bringing out." You could say a lawyer is in a dispute because he is presenting one side of an argument. In "disputing," you show the reasons. In "persuading" you use the reasons to sway opinion. Paul did not speak about things concerning human conduct, social affairs or personal character. He spoke about the things concerning the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is God ruling as King. The only way that God can rule as King in you is when He makes real His promise as contained in the new Covenant. (p.171)

"I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33). If you have the Word of God in your heart and you have in your spirit the disposition to obey the Lord, you will be walking in obedience to His inward guidance. You have to become a Christian to enter into the kingdom of God, and this kingdom of God is in contrast to the kingdom of men. The "kingdom of men" is a way of speaking about the average man's life, when he is trying to be his own boss, and when every man is doing that which is right in his own eyes.

"But when divers were hardened." "Divers" means "various persons." The word "hardened" means that they had said "no" repeatedly. Maybe the first time one said "no," he was in doubt. After a while it became easier and easier to say "no." Then he ceased to think about saying "yes"; his heart has been "hardened." "But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude . . ." (Acts 19:9).

It is a strange but frequent mental attitude that when some people cannot believe, they have to oppose. If they cannot receive a truth, they have to be against it. "He departed from them." Paul left. He "separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:9,10). The whole community came to know what the Gospel was. Paul stayed and taught these things to the people who came to listen.

"And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them" (Acts 19:11,12). Paul was discussing what God would do for them in Christ Jesus. Paul told them that

God would forgive them their sins. He told them that God would change them inwardly and make new persons out of them, and that He would put His Holy Spirit in their hearts. So, on and on, for two years, Paul preached and preached and preached! "And God wrought special miracles" by way of giving approval to this message. This is by way of proof of the authenticity of Paul's relationship with God. As Nicodemus said to the Lord Jesus Christ, "No man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2).

"Then certain of the vagabond Jews [The word *vagabond* refers to those who are the radicals. They are the ones who do not follow the usual pattern.], exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:13). (p.172) An exorcist is someone who makes a practice of casting out evil spirits.

The words *evil spirits* as used here and the word *demons* in the rest of the New Testament have the same meaning. When we talk about anyone being possessed by evil spirits, it will help if you keep in mind one fact: you do not need to think that inside that person, is a kind of brownie, or gremlin, making him do things; yet there is such a thing as being possessed by evil spirits. The evil spirit has a man in his power. At the time of the independence of the African Congo, everyone talked about how Belgium ought to get out of the Congo. By this was meant not the country of Belgium, but the power of Belgium, the influence of Belgium, the control of Belgium. That is what it means to "get Belgium out of the Congo."

The evil spirit in a man does not necessarily mean that a creature is residing inside that man, but that the power of the evil spirit has actually fastened itself upon that man. This spirit, which is not subject to time and space, can actually affect this man just as if he were there physically, but he has no physical being.

These exorcists made a practice of casting out evil spirits. In other words, they delivered people from the power and the control of the evil spirits. They "took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus." It was part of their formula.

". . . saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded" (Acts 19:13-16). Here was a man who did not have control of himself. A malicious spirit was pushing him to do things that were violent and irrational. "And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all" (Acts 19:17).

These Greeks and Jews felt that the things of God were not to be handled lightly. They were greatly impressed. "And the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified" (Acts 19:17). People had a new view of the significance of this name. "And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds" (Acts 19:18). These were people who practiced black magic, or witchcraft. In spite of all the people who, in a sophisticated and intellectual manner, will tell you there is nothing to it, the fact remains that witchcraft goes on all over the world.

Most any missionary who has had first hand contact with native people will tell you this is a real experience. "And many that believed (p.173) came and confessed and shewed their deeds." They showed how they had done just this kind of thing themselves. "Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed" (Acts 19:19, 20).

Life is much like riding in a boat on the waves of the sea. You rise up on a wave, and then go down into the next trough. Then you rise up on another wave and go down into the next trough. The Apostle Paul found this to be true.

At this time in Ephesus the people thought that Paul was a great man and that his ministry was great. "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed."

Immediately following this comes a discouraging incident. "After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome" (Acts 19:21). Paul was planning his future itinerary. "So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season. And the same time there arose no small stir about that way" (Acts 19:22, 23). The phrase "that way" refers to Paul's preaching. Paul told the people how they could receive blessing from God. And no small stir arose about Paul's preaching.

"For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen" (Acts 19:24). Demetrius had established a business out of building little silver shrines, which were images of the goddess Diana. He had a business that brought money to other silversmiths, "whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia [this means Asia Minor, that country we now call Turkey], this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands (Acts 19:25, 26). This is a testimony to the effectiveness of Paul's preaching.

"So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought [Demetrius is saying that they might lose their business if they could not make any more images]; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth" (Acts 19:27). It would be a great blow to the prestige of their religion. The phrase, "the world," means the whole Mediterranean world. If Paul went on (p.174) with his preaching, their religion might be reduced to nothing. "And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (Acts 19:28). This was a slogan which could be shouted. These people were stirred up, because Demetrius had pointed out that if Paul succeeded he would ruin their way of life.

"And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre" (Acts 19:29). The theater was a large, open area, like a football field, where they gathered for public affairs. "And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not" (Acts 19:30). When Paul heard that they had brought his two companions to the theater, he wanted to go in and face the crowd, but the disciples would not let him go. "And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre" (Acts 19:31). They begged him not to risk being involved in a tragic episode. These people had become a mob, and it was hard to know what they would do. "Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together" (Acts 19:32). This usually happens in a mob situation. A large group of people become excited about something, and some of them do not even know what they are excited about.

"And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And

when the townclerk had appeased the people [He is called the townclerk. Perhaps we might call him the mayor], he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?" (Acts 19:33-35). He told them that there was no need to get excited. Everyone knew that they had the true religion and Paul and their friends were not going to change their minds.

Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly (Acts 19:36). (Quiet down so no one will be hurt.) For ye have brought hither these men [Gaius, Aristarchus and Alexander], which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. Wherefore if Demetrius [the silversmith who caused all this trouble] and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is (p.175) open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another [Let them take it to court and prove it]. But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly [We will take it to court and settle this thing in a lawful fashion]. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar [We might cause the Roman soldiers to come in here and accuse us of allowing a riot], there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this course. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly (Acts 19:37-41).

"And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia. And when he had gone over those parts [into Macedonia], and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece." He urged the people to live up to what they believed. He urged them to faith. "And there abode three months." He was not idle during those three months! He continued teaching and preaching. "And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia" (Acts 20:1-3). Whenever they had a chance they were going to cause trouble for him. He knew that the Jews would be waiting to make trouble, and his consistent policy was to avoid conflict wherever possible. So he decided to return through Macedonia, going back the way he had come. "And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus" (Acts 20:4). These were the people who were Paul's traveling companions.

"These going before tarried for us at Troas" (Acts 20:5). Luke, who wrote the Book of the Acts, evidently was along with Paul at this time. "And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days. And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread . . ." (Acts 20:6, 7). Have you ever had anyone raise the question as to why the Christian church observes Sunday instead of Saturday which was the Jewish Sabbath? The Apostle Paul, in the city of Troas, broke bread with the disciples on the first day of the week. They apparently had this sacrament each Lord's Day. "Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight" (Acts 20:7). Every person who has ever listened to a long sermon will smile or shudder at this!

"And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together. And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep" (Acts 20:8, 9). (p.176) Do you have any idea why that young man was sitting in a window? He sat near a window to get air. The "many lights" were coal oil lamps, which burned up the oxygen. The air became heavy with smoke and depleted of oxygen. Paul continued preaching until midnight in a gathering where there was poor ventilation. "As Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead [it looked as if he was dead]. And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him. When he therefore was come up again [when Paul came back from outside where he was with this young lad], and had broken bread, and eaten [when he

had participated in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper with them], and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed. And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted" (Acts 20:9-12).

"And we went before to ship." They went down to the sea and were going to proceed on their trip to Jerusalem. ". . . and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot" (Acts 20:13). Paul had scheduled a long walk for himself. He planned to sail from one port to another, and then walk overland for some distance. We have no idea why he did that. The Scriptures do not tell us. Perhaps he only needed to be alone to meditate.

"And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene. And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next day we came to Miletus. For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus" (Acts 20:14-16). The port of Miletus is a small city down by the sea. The city of Ephesus, a much larger city, was inland, and Paul decided not to go to Ephesus. He had determined to sail by Ephesus. He did not want to go there, because he was afraid of being delayed.

". . . because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost" (Acts 20:16). Pentecost took place in the city of Jerusalem. That was where the Holy Spirit came to be in the hearts of the people. So Paul wanted to share again the blessing and inspiration of fellowship in remembering what God had done for them.

"And from Miletus [a seaport town down by the sea some distance from Ephesus] he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility (p.177) of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:17-21).

You can meet your problems in the same way in which Paul met his. "Ye know . . . after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind," he said. Humility is a frame of mind in which you realize that you do not know everything and cannot do everything. You are conscious that you need help from someone who can do for you what you cannot do for yourself. Paul did not think that he was better than other people, and he did not ask for any special favors.

Paul served "with many tears." He took things to heart. He was personally concerned. The burdens of the people were his burdens. The frustrations of the people were his frustrations. The heartaches of the people were his heartaches. He had his own frustrations, burdens and heartaches, but he could sympathize with the people in their need. He was in trouble many times. ". . . temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews." Testings befell him because people were opposed to him.

Paul had trouble because of religious people who deliberately opposed him. The Gospel can be hindered by religious people who actually think that they are doing God a service when they hinder the preaching and teaching of the Gospel, as it is done by others.

"And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you. When Paul preached, he preached the whole truth. "But have shewed you and taught you publicly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul reminded the elders that that was what he had done all the time he was with them. He preached that they should repent before God and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

To repent toward God means to admit your own weakness and sin, to judge yourself as unfit and real-

ize that you will never be able to live successfully, if it is left up to you. This is the frame of mind of repentance. Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ is understanding that Jesus Christ has come to be your Saviour. You can be in Him: and He can be in you.

Someone might ask why Paul did not pay any attention at all to the problems of living. He did. Dependence upon God through the Holy Spirit solves the problem of living and produces character. (p.178) If you have a man who is right with God, you do not have to worry about his character. When a man has God working in him, that man will be a good citizen.

"And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem [he was compelled in his spirit, as if he was handcuffed to the idea], not knowing the things that shall befall me there [he did not know what to expect]: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide in me" (Acts 20:22, 23). When Paul went from city to city, he gathered the Christians together, and they prayed. They would discuss what they were going to do and pray about it to seek the mind of the Lord and to seek the blessing of the Lord. At every prayer meeting that Paul attended, the people got the feeling in their hearts that Paul was going to have trouble in Jerusalem.

"But none of these things move me." I am not going to stop for that reason. "Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). His trip to Jerusalem was going to be to the glory of God. His trip would enable him to testify about this Gospel there. He wanted to tell people what the grace of God had done all over the world, so he was going back to the mother church in Jerusalem and tell those people what God had done through him among the Gentiles. Since it was to the glory of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, he would go. If he was injured, that was immaterial.

"And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more (Acts 20:25). He had a premonition that he would never come back to see these people, that he was traveling through this part of the country for the last time.

"Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:26, 27). The prophet Ezekiel had been told by God that he was to be a watchman over the house of Israel and Ezekiel was to tell the truth. If he told the truth and man did not change his way, it was man's fault. But if Ezekiel did not tell him the truth and man did not change his way, the man would be lost but Ezekiel would be to blame. This is the way Paul felt about it. He knew the Gospel, and he felt it was his responsibility to see to it that it was preached. When he says, "I have not shunned," this means that he had not hesitated to declare all the counsel of God. The counsel of God is the whole truth of salvation that is in (p.179) Jesus Christ. God will save to the uttermost those who come unto Him by the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves . . ." (Acts 20:28). How will a man take heed unto himself? Does this mean he will never do anything wrong? No, that is not what it means. What does your salvation depend upon? Is it not the grace of God? Is it not what God has done for you in Christ Jesus? As a Christian, you are depending upon Him, and that is a matter of faith. It is a matter of accepting the Word of God. If you go by the Word of God and trust in Him, you will be in His will, and He will comfort and strengthen you. But if your mind wanders, and your heart becomes filled with other things, and you neglect the Word of God and become interested in the things of this world, your confidence in the things of God will become thinner and weaker. Your interest in the things of this world will become stronger, and you will be thrown off balance. The phrase, "take heed unto yourselves," means to be sure that you stay true to the Word of God. "And to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers" (Acts 20:28). Be sure that the people with whom you associate remain true.

"To feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). How can you feed the church of God? Feed the faith of the people. Bring to their minds over and over again testimony about Christ Jesus. Keep digging in Scripture to strengthen faith in the living Lord Jesus Christ. Recall the promises of the Lord.

"For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:29). The Lord Jesus Christ used this same language on the Sermon on the Mount. He said, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matthew 7:15). He goes on to say, "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles? . . . Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:16-20).

I am conscious many times that others are preaching differently than I. In their preaching they criticize some of the very things that I have been expounding. However, when I meet their criticism, I have one question to ask: does this man, who is criticizing my preaching of the Gospel, win souls? Does he magnify the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in the eyes of the people who listen? Perhaps I hear of someone criticizing a great evangelist who is actually preaching (p.180) in such a way that souls are won. "By their fruits ye shall know them." Does that man win souls to God?

"Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30). There will be people right in the church congregation who will bring so-called new ideas, and draw out people after them.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "There must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (I Corinthians 11:19). God allows all these substitutions to be offered so as to test our own faithfulness toward Him. The only safeguard I know for anyone, young or old, educated or uneducated, is a close walk with God.

"Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31). Notice the phrase, "with tears." The apostle was greatly concerned for the spiritual well-being of his people.

"I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). The Scripture which tells you about the grace of God is able to build you up. It will sustain you in any kind of circumstances, regardless of the criticism that is levelled against you, regardless of the strange ideas that are presented to you, regardless of perverse things that men say, that would turn you around and away from these things.

Let us not have any misunderstanding or superficial optimism about this matter of unbelief. If you are casual or careless or superficial about this, you can be swept away in the tide. God only knows how many people are being swept out into unbelief. Men are saying perverse things; and, as Peter says, "even denying the Lord who bought them."

"I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me" (Acts 20:34). Paul made his living by tentmaking. When I was a pastor, I stood before my congregation and told them they could not hire me to preach. I told them they could pay me a pastor's salary and I would work for them during the week. I would do the pastoral calling, the arranging and directing of the work of the church. But when I walked into the pulpit to preach on Sunday, they didn't have enough money in the world to pay me to preach. What I do then I do as unto the Lord. I am echoing the sentiment of any man who is in the ministry for the sake of doing the Lord's work. There is one thing for sure and (p.181) that is that we are not in the ministry because we want anything anyone else has.

"I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). In your church, it is more blessed to give than to receive; in your home, it is more blessed to give than to receive; and in the community, it is more blessed to give than to receive. This is the word of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all" (Acts 20:36). This is the valedictory address of an honest minister who is able to lay down his work with a good conscience. "And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship" (Acts 20:37, 38). (p.182)

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

(Acts 21:1 - 23:11)

"And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them [they left the elders of Ephesus there at Miletus], and had launched [had gone to the ship], we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara: and finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth. Now when we had discovered Cyprus [this means they saw it from a distance as they sailed along], we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden" (Acts 21:1-3).

"And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days" (Acts 21:4). How do you think they found disciples? Obviously, they looked for them. Everywhere Paul went, he looked for believers. Any time we are in a new place, among strange people, we should look for Christians. When you move into a new community, look for Christians, for we need to stand together.

". . . who said to Paul, through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem" (Acts 21:4). As they prayed, individuals felt in their hearts that Paul would get into trouble if he went to Jerusalem. They had a sense of peril for him, and felt in their hearts that he would be going into real danger. They knew their hearts were open to the Lord; they believed that the Holy Spirit was guiding them. But I am not sure this was as much a warning that Paul ought not to go, as much as God's way of warning him of experiences ahead for which he should prepare himself by unusual prayer. And for the friends there, when they felt sure Paul was running into difficulties, it was a challenge to pray earnestly for him.

"And when we had accomplished those days [they had finished their seven-day stay there], we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city; and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed" (Acts 21:5). (p.183)

If you do not kneel when you are praying, you are missing a great deal! The human being prospers when he bends his knees to God. In any part of the world, there is no language where this will not be understood. When a man gets on his knees, it is a position of humility, and it is good for him! Many a man's life would be changed if he would practice getting on his knees. No matter how hard and bitter one's spirit may be, no matter how much burden one may have, when you get on your knees and stay on your knees for a while, things will be different.

"And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again. And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day" (Acts 21:6, 7). They left the town of Tyre where they had stayed for seven days, got on the ship and came to the next city, Ptolemais. This is another case of finding the brethren. "The next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him" (Acts 21:8). They went from Christian to Christian.

"And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles" (Acts 21:9-11). This is the same warning that Paul had received before. This man took his belt, tied up his hands and feet, and said that was the way it was going to be with the man who owned this belt. "When we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusa-

lem" (Acts 21:12). The people were so impressed with what the prophet, Agabus, told them that they begged Paul not to go.

"Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13). He did not deny that it was going to happen.

He was going to run into a storm. The storm warnings were up, but that did not mean that he was not going to sail. He was going to start out, but he knew he would have to ride out the storm.

"And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done" (Acts 21:14). That phrase, "the will of the Lord," is used by us often when we have tried in every possible manner to get our own way. When we do not get our own way, we (p.184) have a habit of saying, "The will of the Lord be done." However, we can be thankful that we have that to depend upon. "And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem" (Acts 21:15).

"There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge" (Acts 21:16). They had made arrangements ahead of time to stay with Christian brethren in Jerusalem. "And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. The day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry" (Acts 21:17-19). The word particularly means he told them in detail, item by item, about his travels from city to city. He told them in each case how God had blessed his ministry among the Gentiles.

In the record in chapter fifteen we are told that the church at Jerusalem held a conference about the problem of whether or not a Gentile could become a Christian without first becoming a Jew. At that time the church decided to send Paul and Barnabas to work among the Gentiles, and Peter to work among the Jews. So Paul had traveled a great deal among the Gentiles, and made it a point to come back to Jerusalem and tell the mother church what God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.

"And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord" (Acts 21:20). They praised God. Great things had happened, and many people believed, but Paul did not claim that he did this himself, nor did the people think that Paul did it. They gave God the glory. "And said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law" (Acts 21:20). This means they were all careful to keep the regulations that Jewish people had always kept.

"And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs" (Acts 21:21). The elders told Paul that the report had come in that he was encouraging the Jewish people, living among the Gentiles, to disregard the Old Testament customs.

"What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together." We will have a big congregational gathering "for they will hear that thou art come" (Acts 21:22). Everyone will want to hear and see this famous preacher. "Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; Them take, and purify (p.185) thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads" (Acts 21:23, 24). This is what is called "taking a vow" among the Jewish people. These men would bind themselves together in a sort of a common agreement that they would maintain a personal spiritual relation with God for a certain period of time. On occasion, they would shave their heads. As long as their heads were shaven, they would be expected to be particularly careful about certain spiritual attitudes and activities.

So these elders told Paul to join these four and "purify yourself with them." In other words, he should

do the necessary things that would make him seem right according to the law, "and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law" (Acts 21:24). They are suggesting to Paul that he act like a Jew. This is a case of exercising liberty. It is a case of exercising personal choice in a situation that is not going to do the Gospel any harm, but is actually going to smooth things over so that there will not be such violent opposition.

As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing [we read about this back in the fifteenth chapter, you will remember], save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication. Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them. And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut (Acts 21:25-30).

Here we have the outbreak of a violent mob action based on a rumor. There is no basis of truth needed for mob action. They were aroused because the statement had been made that Paul was the man who was causing all the trouble in Asia, by teaching the people not to obey the law. That impression could have come about because (p.186) Paul preached definitely that you did not need to keep the law to be saved. He also said that keeping the law would not save you, even if you are a Jew. What Paul did *not* say was that keeping the law and keeping all these regulations was wrong. He did not say that the Jews could not keep the law if they wanted to. His words were twisted around so that the meaning was misinterpreted.

It is so easy to say a thing, but it is so hard to deny it, or recall it. You are put on the defensive whenever anything is said about you that is not true. No wonder the Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake." The Jews accused Paul of bringing Greeks into the temple. Probably they had seen him walking on the street with Trophimus, an Ephesian, who was a Gentile.

"And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar" (Acts 21:31). The city of Jerusalem was occupied by Roman soldiers, who kept order in case of riots. "Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul" (Acts 21:32). When the leaders of the riot saw the soldiers, they ran away.

"Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done. And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude. and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle" (Acts 21: 33, 34). Instead of "castle," we would say courthouse or city hall.

"And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people" (Acts 21:35). The soldiers surrounded Paul so that no one could get to him, because the mob was infuriated and in a rage, desiring to kill him. "For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him" (Acts 21:36). The riot sprang from prejudice, and from deep-rooted opposition and hostility.

"And as Paul was to be led into the castle he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who

said, Canst thou speak Greek?" (Acts 21:37). This chief captain was surprised. Perhaps Paul had been unconscious. They had been beating him. With so much excitement the officers and soldiers probably did not even want to talk to him, as he was considered to be a criminal. But now, as they were carrying him in, he asked to be heard. The captain answered, "Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were (p.187) murderers?" (Acts 21:38). The police chief thought that Paul was a criminal because of all the opposition to him.

"But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia" (Acts 21:39). Tarsus was an important city. Cilicia was a state or a province largely peopled with Greeks. Paul said he was a "Citizen of no mean city," which means that he came from an important place. His background was with educated and cultured people. ". . . and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people [give me the privilege of talking to these people]" (Acts 21:39).

"And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying, Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,) I am verily a man which am a Jew" (Acts 21:40 - 22:3). The word *verily* means "truly" or "indeed." He was brought up in a family that believed in the God of the Bible, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

"I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city [he received his education in Jerusalem] at the feet of Gamaliel, [one of the great scholars of that time], and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers." The word *perfect* means the complete manner. He was given full instructions concerning the law. ". . . And was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day" (Acts 22:3). When he says he was zealous toward God, he means he was anxious to obey God. Notice the courtesy he used when he said, "as ye all are this day." He said this to make them feel that he appreciated the fact that their rioting against him was because they really wanted to serve God. "And I persecuted this way." "This way" refers to the Christian Gospel. "I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished" (Acts 22:4, 5). His record was known to everyone.

"And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light around about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest" (Acts 22:6-8). This voice he heard was the voice of Jesus of Nazareth, who had been put on the (p.188) cross. Now if that person could talk, He must have been raised from the dead! We do not know that the Apostle Paul ever saw the Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh. He may have, but he certainly did not persecute Him directly. Then how did he persecute Jesus of Nazareth? Paul persecuted Jesus when he persecuted the members of His church. The person who makes fun of you because you are a Christian is making fun of the Lord Jesus Christ! The person who is despising you because you pray is despising the One to whom you pray. The person who criticizes you because you give to missions is criticizing the Lord Jesus Christ.

"And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me" (Acts 22.9). The light was real, not imaginary. It was not just some sort of an impression made on Saul's own consciousness. This was a light which people saw. "They heard not the voice of him that spake to me." They did not receive the message that Paul did. "And I said, What shall I

do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do" (Acts 22:10).

"And when I could not see for the glory of that light . . ." His eyes were blinded by the light. Have you ever noticed that when you looked into a bright light and then looked away that you could not see anything for a while? Well, maybe something like that happened here. He was dazed, as it were, by the glory of that light. He had looked suddenly into this bright light, brighter than the noonday sun, and it just left him seeing black.

". . . being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews . . ." He was a man who honored the God of the Bible. He honored the law and kept the law. The Jews had nothing but good to say of this man. "Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him" (Acts 29:11-13). Right at that moment, Paul was able to see.

Ananias went on to say, "The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest bear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard" (Acts 22:14, 15). He was to understand the plan of God. That would involve all Paul's knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures and of the way God had done things. It would involve Paul's knowledge of the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was also to have personal (p.189) fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. When God calls us, He wants us to know His will and come to understand His plan. His will is that we should believe on Him whom He has sent. You should have personal dealings with Jesus Christ and understand what He wants you to do, because you are His witness "unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard."

Ananias went on to say, "And now why tarriest thou?" Why not respond at once? ". . . arise, and be baptized," publicly identify yourself with the name of Jesus Christ. Let everyone know by an action of yours in public that you belong to those who believe in Him. ". . . and wash away thy sins . . ." (Acts 22:16).

From the way in which the passage reads, you get the impression that the ceremony of baptism would have something to do with the washing away of sins. But actually it is the Lord Jesus Christ who takes away your sins. When you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, your sins are laid upon Him. He takes away from you the stain of sin. And so this is what Ananias told Paul. He said, "You should have personal dealings with the Lord Jesus Christ, because you are to be His witness. And since that is the case, why not get up right now and be baptized and make a public profession of your faith in Jesus Christ? Wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord, Be delivered from sin in yourself through the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ." In effect, this is what Ananias told Paul.

"And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; and saw him saying to me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me" (Acts 22:17, 18). And so the Lord Jesus Himself urged Paul to leave Jerusalem at once.

"And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him" (Acts 22:19, 20). Paul said to the Lord, "Lord, they know all that. They would not misunderstand me now." "And he said unto me, Depart; for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles" (Acts 22:21).

"And they gave him audience unto this word . . . [they listened to him quietly until he said this one word *Gentile*] . . . and then lifted up their voice, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it

is not fit that he should live. And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle" (Acts 22: 22-24). So Paul was brought back to the courthouse. He had not made any real progress with his speech. They had listened to his (p.190) personal testimony. They had listened patiently to what the Lord had said to him, but when he said he was going to the Gentiles, the old mob feeling arose again, and they would not listen to him any more.

Anyone who has ever had anything to do with people in a public ministry will know that when people come together in a crowd, they act more like children than they do like men. You cannot approach people who come together in a group in the same way as you do privately. You can talk to a man privately, and he will act his age, but when he gets in with a crowd, he will not act as maturely, nor as responsibly as before.

"The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him" (Acts 22:24). It was a custom in the courts in those times to beat an accused person in order to make him tell the truth. Their spirits would be broken, and they couldn't do anything else but tell the truth. So Paul was about to be beaten in this crude way.

"And as they bound him with thongs [they tied him there to beat him], Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" (Acts 22:25). Paul was bringing up a point of law. "When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman" (Acts 22:26). Roman citizens were free from this kind of punishment. The law permitted people who were not Romans, such as the Jews, to be beaten. Paul therefore stated that it was not lawful for them to beat him, because he was a Roman and also was uncondemned of any crime.

"Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom" (Acts 22:27, 28). The chief captain meant by this that he had to pay a fee, as was the custom in those days, to become a Roman. It was like an initiation fee. "And Paul said, But I was free born" (Acts 22:28). If a father was a Roman, his son would be a Roman. The interesting fact is that Paul was born of Jewish parents, it is true, but they were Roman citizens. By saying that he was free born, Paul meant he was better off than the centurion, because he, Paul, was a Roman of long standing, or from birth.

"Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him" (Acts 22:29). (p.191) He knew that he should not have arrested Paul. "On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them" (Acts 22:30). The Roman officer wanted to find out what all the uproar was about. So he requested the Jews to bring their council to the court. No matter how ready you may be to suffer for Christ's sake, it is not wise to suffer uselessly. If you have anything to say that would put you in a better light, why not say it? Why not bring out the truth of the situation which would enable you to escape the suffering? That is what Paul did. There is no particular reason why you should suffer unnecessarily.

By the way, Paul spoke in three different ways to these people. When the officer first arrested him he spoke Greek. He could speak Greek, as he was brought up in an important Grecian city. Then, as he turned to speak to the Jewish people, he spoke Hebrew. When they heard him speaking in Hebrew, they listened quietly. Then as they were about to beat him again, he stated that he was a Roman. In all of this

we can see how Paul used various ways of escaping as far as possible unnecessary suffering that these violent people had brought upon him.

The Roman government judged the serious crimes that came up, but in matters of local religion and social customs, the Romans let the Jews solve their own problems. The Romans did not know local customs, so they only supervised to make sure that no Roman law was broken in what was being done. During the riot, Roman soldiers had arrested Paul, and the chief captain put Paul into protective custody. Then he called the Jews to bring their council down to the court where they would try Paul in the presence of the Roman officers.

"And Paul, earnestly beholding the council said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him, to smite him on the mouth" (Acts 23:1, 2). Ananias commanded the soldiers standing by him to slap him, because Paul claimed he lived in good conscience. To the chief priest that was impossible. "Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?" (Acts 23:3). When you look at a wall that has been white-washed, you think the wall is white. The truth is, only the covering is white. Inside it is made up of stone, or perhaps adobe or mud. This was the way in which they referred to a man who made a pretense of being a pious man. Paul knew the law of the Jews. (p.192) He knew that they were not supposed to hit a man before he was proven guilty. Ananias was supposed to be a judge, but was not acting like a good one.

"And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?" (Acts 23:4). They asked Paul if he was going to talk impudently against the chief priest. "Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest" (Acts 23:5). He did not recognize that he was the high priest. ". . . for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people" (Acts 23:5). Paul was apologizing, because he spoke out against this man. No doubt Paul would have acted differently if he had realized the office the man held. Some people in public office today conduct themselves reprehensibly. We should oppose them and repudiate them. But the Christian will respect the position even if he does not respect the man.

"But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question" (Acts 23:6). This was an out-and-out maneuver on Paul's part. When he said, "I am a Pharisee," he knew that this would start an argument.

Look what happened. "And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided" (Acts 23:7). Paul was going to get free of this charge against him with what we would call a "hung jury." He aroused such an argument between them that they could not agree. "For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: "but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God" (Acts 23:8, 9).

They were arguing about what Paul said in his original speech when he told of his Damascus road experience.

Was it right for Paul to start an argument like this? When I was a young man, I was a boxing instructor in the Canadian Army, and many, many times I find myself going back to some of the principles we taught in boxing. One thing we used to tell the boys: Don't lead with your chin! When you see that someone is going to swing at you, it is all right to duck. If you can avoid a blow, do so. This saves your strength for the real work ahead.

"And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle" (Acts 23:10). (p.193)

Although this council came together for the express purpose of indicting Paul and condemning him, when the argument was raised concerning the various views that they held, they got so involved in their argument that they lost sight of Paul altogether and could not reach any conclusion.

"And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome" (Acts 23:11). Paul had just succeeded in a clever maneuver to throw the council into such confusion that they could not reach any decision to condemn him. Someone could have said, "That is very fine work, Paul; you are a clever man." Paul was not satisfied with that kind of thing. He was depressed. Even though he had won a certain kind of victory, he was personally feeling a heavy burden. That night the Lord stood by him. The apostle was not left to his own clever and brilliant maneuvering. He had scored a victory, but this presented little encouragement. The next day more trouble could come. During the night something happened to him that was not based on the Sadducees or the Pharisees. Paul found a certain confidence and strength, not because there was any answer to the argument, not because there was any solution to the big controversy, but because he had personal dealings with the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus did not lead Paul to some clever new insight; He did not lead Paul to some wise reconciliation of all the different points of view on the resurrection. What He gave to Paul was personal fellowship with Him. (p.194)

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

(Acts 23:12 - 26:32)

Did you notice that the Lord Jesus allowed Paul to become involved in a controversy even to the point of danger, and that although He came and dealt with Paul personally, He did not change the situation? The ways of God do not lead us into ease or escape from strain, trouble or danger. God leads us rather through temptations into glory.

"And when it was day [the very next morning], certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse [they took a vow], saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. And they were more than forty which made this conspiracy. And they came to the chief priests, and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you tomorrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him" (Acts 23:12-15). They planned to ambush him and kill him. You could well wonder, "Is the Lord with him? Is the Lord watching over him?" just the night before He had stood by Paul and told him not to be afraid. These moments of fellowship with the Lord not only encourage us about the past but also prepare us and encourage us for the future.

"And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul" (Acts 23:16). So Paul now understood these men were waiting to kill him. "Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee. Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and (p.195) asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me? And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldst bring down Paul tomorrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly. But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee. So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me" (Acts 23:17-22). When his nephew came and told him that they were going to kill him, should Paul have said, "Well, I am in the hands of the Lord. Whatever the Lord wants to do that is what He is going to do"? No, Paul sent word to the chief captain about the truth of the situation.

"He called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten (70 horsemen), and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; and provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor" (Acts 23:23, 24). He would send him to another court. Paul could not have done a thing about this, for he was almost helpless. When Paul sent word to the chief captain, he did not make any particular plea. He did not ask the chief captain to be merciful to him, he simply sent the information.

The whole story would have been different if Paul had not sent his nephew to the chief captain. There is something we can do. We cannot do everything, but God can. Here is Paul, a prisoner. He cannot get out. Men are planning to kill him from ambush. He is helpless. But he can send word to the chief captain. The chief captain can do something. In his heart Paul trusted the Lord who told him the night before that he was going eventually to Rome. Paul had confidence. But the confidence that Paul had did not re-

sult in his deciding to do nothing. He told the chief captain of the plans of these conspirators who were going to kill him.

God arranged that help should come to Paul from the Romans. They were not Jews and they were not Christians. They were pagans, and yet God used them. In this whole situation there was so much over which Paul had no control. We as Christians may often find ourselves in situations that are undesirable, even impossible. We may be face to face with situations that are beyond our control. That does not mean that we do not do anything. If there is an action that we can take, we should take that action, trusting in the Lord to use it. Do not be surprised if God brings help to you from the most unusual, unexpected circumstances and sources. (p.196)

"Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris. On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle: who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him. And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia; I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall" (Acts 23:31-35). This sounds like an ordinary court report. In all of this Paul was entirely helpless, while everything was happening to him. In all of this he was a helpless victim. Does this mean that God had turned His back on him?

Paul had been able to give his testimony in front of the council of the Jews, among the rulers, and now he was going to stand before the governor and give his testimony there. There was no other way he could ever have brought the message there. God was working all things together in such a way that Paul could serve Him and glorify Him.

"After five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul" (Acts 24:1). We use the word orator to refer to some eloquent speaker. Today, we would call him a prosecuting attorney. He was brought down for the express purpose of accusing Paul before the governor. So Paul had to stand and bear an eloquent man accusing him. "And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, we accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee. I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words" (Acts 24:2-4).

All of this was eloquent talk. It was the kind of talk that should have gained him a favorable hearing. "For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law" (Acts 24: 5, 6). Look at this indictment for a moment. "A pestilent fellow." We would say he was a pest, a man who was stirring up trouble. "A mover of sedition among the Jews" would be a person who was causing dissatisfaction and trouble. "A ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes." These are all general judgments. But then Tertullus (p.197) brought in one specific thing, "Who also has gone about to profane the temple." This was a lie.

"But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands [he criticized the action of the police captain], commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him. And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so" (Acts 24:7-9). All those people that were there added their weight to the charges against him.

This is a common sort of adverse criticism that any of us may have to face. You may be seeking to

witness for the Lord Jesus Christ, But someone may find fault with the way you are doing things and they may tell it as though you were trying to do harm, as if you were trying to upset folks instead of trying to help them. Actually all that you want to do is to advance the Gospel. The criticism against you will be unfair. They will say you are interfering where you do not belong. They will say that you are causing trouble. Remember how it was with Paul. He was falsely accused of these things, but he was able to endure it because the Lord was with him.

"Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself" (Acts 24:10). Paul was courteous. He certainly did not hold Felix responsible for the fact that he was being asked to account for these things. He courteously and almost cordially said to Felix, "I am glad to have a chance to tell you what the situation actually is."

"Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship" (Acts 24:11). That was to answer the charge that he was a mover of sedition among the Jews. He had only been in the city twelve days. "And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city" (Acts 24:12). That is a point blank denial of the charges. "Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me" (Acts 24:13). "I was not in the temple arguing with anyone," Paul said; "I was not arousing the people about anything." What always makes a difference at a time of controversy and accusation is a straightforward, honest action on the part of a man who has nothing to hide. He shows he has nothing to hide by bringing out the facts as they actually are.

"But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers." That is the real truth of the matter. "So worship I the God of my fathers, believing (p.198) all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:14-16). "The reason is because I am presenting a way of living before God that they do not want to hear, which they call heresy," Paul was saying here. That is really why he had come to Jerusalem, to do good. "Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple [meaning according to ritual law], neither with multitude, nor with tumult. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me" (Acts 24:18,19). Some of those people who were at the temple should have been here, to say something about it.

"Let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day" (Acts 24:20, 21). Now some of these people would admit that when Paul stood before the council, he gave an adequate answer for everything that he had done, unless it be this one thing, that he raised the fact that he was a Pharisee. Perhaps Paul was not altogether satisfied with the use he made of his relation with the Pharisees when he was standing before the council. If there was any one thing about which complaint might have been made, it was this maneuver.

So, as Paul had come to stand in court and be lied about, he confronted the lie with the truth. Over against the accusation, Paul gave a simple, clear presentation of his own testimony. A Christian needs to have a clear conscience whenever he is confronted with false accusations.

In these verses, we have what I would call a classic description of a Christian. "But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves

also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." We have here four characteristics that are to be found in any normal Christian experience. The first one is worship: "So worship I the God of my fathers." The next one is faith: "Believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets." The next is hope: "And have hope toward God which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust." And the fourth is (p.199) love: "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men." This is the true character of a Christian.

First, the matter of worship. The word *worship* may well have come from two words, *worth ship*, and has a bearing on what you esteem to be important. Anything that you lift up as the most important thing in your life, that which has the first claim upon you in your love and your loyalty, will be that toward which you give yourself in worship. Not everyone worships the God of the Bible. Some people worship money. They think it is the most important thing in the world. They would do anything to make money. They think more about money than about virtue. They will strain themselves in every way to get hold of money. They won't give anything to those who are needy, because they want to save their money. So you see, you can worship money.

Some people worship pleasure. Such people will do anything to have a good time. "They are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." They would rather go to a ball game than to a prayer meeting. You can worship power. You can be so interested in becoming prominent that you worship prominence. Some people worship their business. They may think more of their business than they think of their family.

The Apostle Paul worshiped the God of the Bible. This is the trait of the real Christian.

"Believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets" draws attention to his faith. He believed the promises in the Word of God.

"And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection." A Christian person expects a resurrection. This world is not everything. Everyone is going to stand in the presence of God to render an account of the deeds done in the body.

And love -- "herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." In everything he tried to act in such a way as to give no offense to God and no offense to man. This is the classic description of a Christian.

"And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way [understanding more about it than the others], he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter" (Acts 24:22). He continued the case. He did not reach a decision at that time. Lysias was the man who arrested Paul. Felix would wait to hear his testimony before coming to a decision. (p.200)

"And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him" (Acts 24:23). He placed Paul under what we would call open arrest. He was in the custody of the law, but he was not put in a cell. He was allowed to have liberty, and his friends could come to visit him. Felix treated Paul more kindly than the Jews did. Even in our day the world is often kinder to us than offended Christians. People right in your own church can take offense about something that you are trying to do and can resist you and oppose you far more bitterly than the people in the world do.

"After certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ" (Acts 24:24). Now we can see something in the providence of

God that allowed Paul to be brought there as a prisoner. "And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee" (Acts 24:25). Here is a man who came to hear a preacher. The preacher affected him so profoundly that he actually trembled. His answer was, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee [I am not ready just now to make up my mind]."

His rejection was not just a matter of putting off. "He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him" (Acts 24:26). We are reminded of people who go to church because it is good for their business. They go to contact people who can help them out. "But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix's room." Paul was kept a prisoner for two years. "And Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound" (Acts 24:27). Though Felix had been deeply stirred, he left Paul a prisoner for political reasons.

"Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem. Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, and desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him" (Acts 25:1-3). The high priest and the chief Jews in Jerusalem tried to prevail upon Festus to send Paul there. Then they had planned privately, if he was ever on the highway, that they would ambush him and kill him.

"But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither" (Acts 25:4). Once again, when the Jews were so intent on doing Paul harm, his protection came from pagans. They were going to carry out the law. "Let them (p.201) therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him. And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought. And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove. While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all" (Acts 25:5-8).

The Jews came down and brought all these accusations against Paul but he simply asked for the evidence. They could not prove their charges. They had no evidence by which they could prove it was so. "Neither against the law of the Jews" -- I haven't broken it -- "neither against the temple" -- I haven't defiled it -- "nor yet against Caesar" -- I have broken no Roman law. On the surface you would say that Paul should go free. "But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?" (Acts 25:9). That was what the Jews wanted. They wanted to get him on the highway running from Caesarea to Jerusalem where a mob would ambush him. Paul knew it. The Jews had prevailed upon Festus to bring him up, but Festus would not do it over Paul's unwillingness, because Paul had the right, by law, to stay where he was. But now Festus asked Paul, "Would you go up there and let them try you up there?"

"Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat [Paul was in a Roman court and wanted to stay there], where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest" (Acts 25:10). He hadn't broken any law of the Jews. "For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar" (Acts 25:11). Paul made use of his knowledge of Roman law. He would not concede anything to these people whose intentions were wicked. He persistently refused to do what they wanted to have done.

"Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? Unto Caesar shalt thou go" (Acts 25:12). It sounded like more trouble for Paul, but it did not turn out that way. Paul was going to go to Rome. The Gospel was going to be spread that much farther.

Paul, perhaps the greatest minister, evangelist, missionary preacher of the early church, had been involved in a prolonged controversy (p.202) with other people who also claimed to be believers in God. He had been in prison for more than two years. First he had been in prison under Felix and then he was left there under Festus. Now Festus remanded him to be brought before King Agrippa.

"And after certain days King Agrippa and Bernice [Agrippa's wife] came unto Caesarea to salute Festus" (Acts 25:13). They came to honor him. "And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix: about whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him. [They wanted me to act against him.] To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him" (Acts 25:14-16). A very basic principle in Roman law was that if you accuse a man of anything, he has a right to face you and give an account of his side of the argument.

"Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth. Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed. But had certain questions against him of their own superstition [their own religion], and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive" (Acts 25:17-19).

What was it about Paul's preaching to which they objected? This was it: that Jesus was alive. Paul was not preaching some social reform and getting into trouble because of it. He was not preaching about the repeal of certain laws. He was not agitating to change the government. This is what he was saying: "Jesus is alive." That was the real issue.

"And because I doubted of such manner of questions [I did not feel competent to deal with him], I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters. [In other words, go up there to the center of their religion and get this thing straightened out.] But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus [that was the Caesar of the day; and Paul wanted to keep the case in the Roman court], I commanded him to be kept until I might send him to Caesar" (Acts 25:20, 21). The name "Caesar" was a title like "president"; "Augustus" was the name of the man, much as you might say "President Roosevelt" or "President Johnson." So you say "Caesar Augustus." (p.203)

Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him. And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth. And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer. But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him. Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him (Acts 25:22-27).

Paul himself was helpless in all of this. But he was going to go to Rome. He was to bear witness there. The Lord had come to him and told him that as he had given his witness in Jerusalem, he was to give wit-

ness in Rome. He did not fuss, he did not fight. But he would not yield. That is the way the Gospel will be served.

King Agrippa had a position of responsibility higher than Festus, the governor. First, Paul had been brought before the Jewish council. In the big argument that broke after the council could not agree about what to do with him, the chief captain arrested Paul, took him to the castle, and then brought him before Felix the governor and accused him there. Paul had defended himself. Felix could not bring himself to let Paul go because he wanted to do the Jews a pleasure but he could not condemn Paul either because he had a feeling in his heart that Paul was right. In his indecision he left Paul a prisoner for two whole years.

Then Portius Festus came to be governor. When he came into the position of governorship, the Jewish leaders came before him and accused Paul again. They requested that Paul be returned to Jerusalem under their care and that he should answer in their court. On the way they still planned to ambush him. Paul had resisted this and when Festus asked him whether he would go up to Jerusalem to answer for these charges, Paul had replied properly within his rights, "I am standing in a Roman court before the representative of Caesar, and I am ready to answer right here. If they have anything against me let them bring it right here to this court. This is the highest court. This is where I will stay." And when they wondered (p.204) what to do with him, he appealed unto Caesar. So Festus kept him prisoner and decided to bring him to the attention of King Agrippa.

Now Paul stood before Agrippa. "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself" (Acts 26:1). Paul had been kept in prison for several years because the authorities would not release him, although they had no real ground for keeping him. How do you think Paul would act? Wouldn't you expect that he would resent all this -- that in his reply now there should be some bitterness? Let us listen: "Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself: I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently" (Acts 26:1-3).

There is no evidence at all of Paul being disgruntled. He had been left in prison for more than two years, just because the governor could not make up his mind to act according to the law. Paul had every human right to be resentful, but he gave no expression to any feeling of resentment. There is no bitterness in what he said. After all, it was not Agrippa's fault that he was in prison. Paul is poised in this whole matter.

"My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest, sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" (Acts 26:4-8). So Paul presents to Agrippa his basic argument, The Lord Jesus said that the only sign that would ever be given of the Christian Gospel was the sign that was given in Jonah who was three days in the belly of the whale and then was brought out alive. So the Son of Man was to be three days in the bowels of the earth and be raised from the dead. This is the essence of the Christian Gospel and this Paul told to Agrippa. The real issue at stake was Paul's claim that Jesus of Nazareth really was raised from the dead.

Now there are many things involved in that claim. It means Jesus was really God. It means His sacrifice on Calvary was really accepted. It means one can be born again. In this statement of Paul's, there are no overtones of defeat. He had been kept in prison (p.205) for two years, but we do not find him whin-

ing. He had been unfairly dealt with, but we do not find in him any sense of discouragement or distress at this point. There was no wheedling, no whining, no cringing, no counter-accusation. He did not even say anything against the Jews, or against the Pharisees. He did not blame anyone for the treatment that he had received. In a straightforward manner, he told Agrippa what the issue was: I am teaching and preaching the resurrection of the dead, and they are against it.

As far as Paul's treatment was concerned, it was not because the Jews did not like him personally. Many of the Jews did not even know him personally. And this is a realistic way of seeing things. The opposition we may encounter as we teach and preach is not necessarily personal. No one specially means us any harm. They just do not want us to teach what we are teaching. They just do not want us to preach what we are preaching. They do not want these ideas set out. Paul's procedure was wise. He brought the point right down to the real issue, which was the resurrection. He did not even refer to the charges that had been made against them.

"I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9). This is a report of Paul's past. Paul had led in the persecution of the church in his earlier years. "Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests [I would get a warrant for their arrest from the chief priests claiming that they were teaching what they should not teach and they were disturbing the peace]; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them" (Acts 26.10). One outstanding incident was the case of Stephen. Those who stoned Stephen to death laid their clothes at the feet of Saul.

And I punished them oft in every synagogue [wherever I came across these people who talked about believing in Christ, I exercised the full authority that I had to bring them into trouble and distress], and compelled them to blaspheme [I tried to make them change their testimony]; and being exceedingly mad against them [bitterly opposed to them], I persecuted them even unto strange cities. Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth [this was not some hallucination; it happened to everyone in the company], I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks (Acts 26:11-14). (p.206)

The Lord Jesus was referring to the way Paul was being affected in his conscience. God was working with him and pushing him along toward some conclusion. He was resisting it and God was saying, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

"And I said, who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:15-18). That is what Paul understood he was to do as a preacher. "Rise, stand upon thy feet."

You must personally respond to the call of the Lord. If you are going to be a witness for the Lord, He will have to tell you what He wants you to do. "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness." How would Paul become a minister of the Gospel? Would he go to school and pass certain examinations? Would certain people in the church approve him and ordain him? The truth of the matter is that the Lord Jesus Christ comes to the person whom He calls and indicates what He wants that person to think about and to do. Paul was called to be a witness, "both of these things

which thou hast seen, and of those things in which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee." Although the apostle would run into trouble, he would be delivered.

"To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." The preacher's business is to so preach and teach that people who did not know before will now come to know. The function of the preacher is to turn his hearers from darkness to light. This would imply that people normally live in darkness. Because a man is walking in darkness, that does not mean he cannot be intelligent as men go. He could have a good education. In the field of business he might be a smart man. Yet deep inside himself, it could be dark. So the minister is to turn him from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God.

This also implies that people are under the power of Satan. Satan has a way of putting before me the things I want and making them look very attractive, and then I foolishly reach up for those (p.207) things to take them. If my heart and mind were under the power of Satan, I would not be able to believe the Bible. I would not believe that what happened at Calvary's cross could make any real difference to me. I would not believe so much in yielding oneself to God and doing what He would have done. I would turn away from God. Human beings have their eyes blinded because they are born that way. Human beings live in darkness because they do not walk in the ways of God. Paul was given the commission, as it were, from God that he was to deliver the people who would listen to him. All of this preaching is to have one issue -- that the person who listens to it and yields himself to God will receive the forgiveness of sins and will be received into the kingdom of God that he may have inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith.

"Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19). He did what he was told. "But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (Acts 26:20).

"Repent" means more than that you should be sorry for your sins. Doubtless your sins are something to be sorry for, but do not think that is the full meaning. Repentance means that you should consider yourself a weak sinner. You should look on yourself as someone who has done wrong and is subject to the judgment of God. To repent is actually to judge one's self as unfit as far as God is concerned. It follows very naturally to say that you should repent and turn to God because when a man loses confidence in himself, he may then open his heart to confidence in God. In the presence of God I admit that I am not what I ought to be and I turn to God for help. "And do works meet for repentance" means I will actually demonstrate in myself some meekness, quietness and patience that I did not have before. If men felt themselves to be sinners and they turned to God, then they should repudiate their sins, come to church, read the Bible, and pray. Those would be works that are in line with repentance.

"For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me" (Acts 26:21). Because this was so different from the religion that was being preached and taught among the Jews, they were opposed to Paul. They undertook to kill him. "Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day." He did not have the strength to defend himself and yet God watched over him and kept him. "Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things (p.208) than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come" (Acts 26:22). If what you are preaching is what the prophets have always preached, there is a good chance that it is true. "That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and

should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:23). This is what he preached.

"And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. [You have gone beyond the boundaries of good judgment. You have so much education you have gone crazy.] But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely" (Acts 26:24-26). After all, King Agrippa understood many of these things. "For I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner" (Acts 26:26).

"King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest" (Acts 26:27). When Paul asks, "Believest thou the prophets?" he is not questioning, "Do you think the historical records of the Bible are true?" That is not the point. The thing is that the prophets preached the truth of God. They preached to Israel certain promises of God. They emphasized to the people who heard them that God would do certain things. Now do you believe it? Do you believe the things that they prophesied would happen? Paul was sure that Agrippa, deep down in his heart, felt that the prophets had actually told the truth.

"Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (Acts 26:28). Some people believe that these words were said in sarcasm. I do not have any evidence to show that Agrippa might have been a scornful man. He does not seem to be the kind of man who would make fun of Christianity in any way, or would dismiss it as being of no account. I think that Agrippa actually felt that there was something right about Paul's stand.

"And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds" (Acts 26:29). In this Paul pressed the matter home to him and urged him to commit himself. When Agrippa had said, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian," he indicated that becoming a Christian was a choice or decision. You could know all the facts and not give yourself to them.

"And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying. This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. Then said Agrippa (p.209) unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar" (Acts 26:30-32). When Agrippa and those who were with him had talked it over, they came to the conclusion that Paul had not done anything that was worthy of death. "Appealing unto Caesar" is like taking your case to the Supreme Court. Paul had filed an appeal and it had to be taken to the Supreme Court.

In this whole matter no action was taken. Paul had witnessed; Agrippa had listened. Agrippa had been affected, but he took no action. Festus also saw the whole picture. He saw everything that was done, but no action was taken.

Sometimes we meet together in a group meeting, organized to get things done in the best way that we possibly can. Someone makes a motion and proposes that we act in a certain way. But no one takes it up, no one seconds the motion. We say, "The motion died for want of a second."

After you have heard the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, you know in yourself that you are a lost sinner. Then the call goes out and you are asked to come to the Lord and dedicate yourself to Him. That motion is made. The motion is made that you begin to serve the Lord. But you do not do anything. You listen and say nothing, and you never become a Christian. You had a chance. The call was put out to you, you faced it and understood it, but you did not do anything about it. It is a matter of yielding yourself to God. Agrippa did not. He is another one of those people who saw the truth, but did not act on it. (p.210)

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

(Acts 27:1-28:31)

Can a person who believes in God and trusts Him for salvation expect that God will lay His hand on him in everyday affairs? Can a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ expect that God will watch over him day by day? These are some of the questions which we will find answered as we study the last two chapters of the Book of the Acts.

"When it was determined that we should sail into Italy. . ." (Acts 27:1). Paul and his company were on the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea at Palestine. He had been taken down to Caesarea to be tried before Agrippa. He had appealed to be taken before the Supreme Court of the whole empire, namely the court of Caesar. So Paul and certain people who were with him had to be escorted as prisoners to Rome.

"And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band. And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us. And the next day we touched at Sidon" (Acts 27:1-3). The whole program was arranged by other people. Paul was being shipped to Italy, but no one asked him how he wanted to go. Plans were all made and he was just taken along. In other words, Paul was helpless in this whole matter.

"And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself (Acts 27:3). Julius was a man of the world, not one of the Christians, and not even one of the Jews. He was the centurion, in charge of the detail that was holding Paul prisoner. Once again Paul was more kindly treated by pagans than he was by his own people.

"And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus [that is, beside it], because the winds were contrary. And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came (p.211) to Myra, a city of Lycia. And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein. And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone; And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea" (Acts 27:4-8).

The whole course of events happened in a routine fashion. For any one of us, routine can be right. Just doing the things the way they come, accepting them just the way they are, can be the very road that we are to go. Sometimes God picks you up and sets you in a situation you have never had before, but even when you set down there, things may move along normally. Being a Christian does not really change anything about our relationships in this world. We still have routines to follow.

"Now when much time was spent [they stopped at this port and stopped at that port, and the summer was getting away], and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past" (Acts 27:9). It is generally felt that this fast was a time of public holiday which occurred at the equinox, at the time when the days and the nights are the same length, when the sun is crossing over to the south. At this time, in the northern hemisphere storms can come up. Oftentimes this makes sailing dangerous.

"Paul admonished them, and said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives" (Acts 27:9, 10). Paul commented that it was going to be dangerous. Paul did not have anything against the sailors. He was not bitter and resentful. He was interested in the welfare of all those aboard.

"Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul" (Acts 27:11). This was not because he thought that the ship owner was a

more honest man than Paul, but rather "because the haven was not commodious to winter in" (Acts 27:12). The harbor was not very large. The accommodations were not good. "The more part advised to depart thence also." They were not thinking about the weather. They were thinking about the harbor. They did not want to spend all winter in that small community.

"If by any means they might attain to Phenice and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west" (Acts 27:12). That is, it was on that side of the island. It would be more comfortable over there. "And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete" (Acts 27:13). (p.212) This decision to sail on was based on personal preference. It was made on the basis of poor judgment. I think that expression, "when the south wind blew softly," is a classic expression of wishful thinking. They did not want to stop in that place anyway. They wanted to get to a larger harbor and then when the wind blew along softly, they thought they had their wish and they started out.

"But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive. And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat" (Acts 27:14-16). It was a difficult thing to control the boat because the wind was strong.

"Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away" (Acts 27:17-20).

The peril was increasing by the hour and they were acting like experienced sailors in seeking to bring the ship through safely. They had to throw the cargo overboard. They had to throw the tackling overboard. Yet it grew worse and worse until finally because of the heavy storm with neither sun nor stars, there was no way of checking their position, and so they were lost at sea. Soon all hope that they should be saved was taken away. It looked hopeless. Though Paul, a servant of God, was on this ship, God allowed these things to happen.

A Christian person can be living with a family which does not live a spiritual life. They make their decisions on a natural basis. The family sells the home in one part of the city and moves to another neighborhood. Maybe the husband has just changed jobs, and the wife may have nothing to say about it. Would this mean that God is not watching over her?

Here was a ship in grave danger. Paul was there and Paul belonged to God. "But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst." After going without food for a long time, doubtless that he might pray more earnestly to God, "Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And (p.213) now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship" (Acts 27:21, 22).

Should Paul have mentioned the fact that he had warned them not, to go? Doesn't this sound like a person who says, "I told you so?" I do not think so. He had told them not to go and now they were in danger of their lives. Now he was going to tell them something else, and he wanted them to listen. "And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship." No matter how severe that storm was, no matter how routine all the purposes and practices of the crew had been, no matter how much Paul had been pulled in and taken along without any question on his part, Paul was not hopeless. They had lost hope. They had decided the storm was so severe they could

not come out of it alive. But Paul had not lost hope. He had been praying to God".

"For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve" (Acts 27:23). What a wonderful thing to be able to bear personal testimony to a personal revelation from God. "There stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee" (Acts 27:24). Paul had been told before what was going to happen. He would get a chance to go to Italy to Caesar's court. The storm was not going to be able to stop God. What God is going to do with you, He will do. "And lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." Does not that sound as though he had prayed for them? "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me" (Acts 27:25). In the midst of their darkest hour, when everyone had lost confidence, this man who had spent time in prayer, stepped out before them and said, "I tell you, men, things are going to turn out all right because my God is in control."

Howbeit, we must be cast upon a certain island. But when the fourteenth night was come [for two weeks the storm had raged on the Mediterranean Sea; for two weeks they had been fighting the storm day and night, with the fear that the ship would be sunk], as we were driven up and down in Adria [the Adriatic Sea, a portion of the Mediterranean Sea], about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country [They estimated that they were getting near land. But of course, at midnight it was pitch dark]; And sounded [they dropped the necessary instrument for measuring the depth of the water], and found it twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms. [The water was getting shallower.] Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks [they were afraid (p.214) they would be swept right up on the rocks on the shore], they cast four anchors out of the stem, and wished for the day. And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea [they let down the smaller rowboats in which they were going to leave], under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship [they let the boat down pretending that they would get the anchors out at some distance from the boat in the front so as to anchor the boat both from the rear and from the front. But what they were actually going to do was to get the boat down there and then escape], Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved (Acts 27:26-31).

Paul had received assurance from God that everyone who was on the ship would be saved just as he was. But, here is the point: they would be saved if they stayed on the ship. Because Paul was going to be spared, the ship was going to be spared, and if the ship was going to be spared, the people on it were going to be spared. There was no promise that they were going to be spared because of who they were. The promise was they would be spared if they were with Paul.

"Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off" (Acts 27:32). The soldiers took over above the sailors. The sailors, the men who ran the ship, let the boat down, but the soldiers were in charge. They cut the ropes and let that boat fall away. "And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. Wherefore I pray you to take some meat. for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you" (Acts 27:33, 34). We find this prisoner, who was helpless from a human point of view, giving the orders. He was not a sailor, he was not a soldier; he was a prisoner, and yet he took over the leadership of the whole group and told them what to do.

"And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all" (Acts 27:35). Is it fitting for a Christian in a public place to bow his head and to give thanks? Paul did it.

"And when he had broken it, he began to eat. Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat" (Acts 27:35, 36). The practical situation in which we find ourselves actually give us an opportunity to show the reality of our relationship with God. We should take every chance we can to give

that kind of testimony. "And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls [276 persons]" (Acts 27:37). (p.215)

"And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea" (Acts 27:38). They threw away all the surplus food. Obviously, they were expecting to get to land. Because the ship would have to come in over the shallow waters, it should be as light as possible, so that it would not sink too deeply in the water. "And when it was day, they knew not the land." They did not recognize this place. "But they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship" (Acts 27:39). As they sailed around this island, they saw a point where it looked as if they could steer the ship. "And when they had taken up the anchors [releasing the ship so that it could sail], they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore. And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground" (Acts 27:40, 41).

Water was running down a river one way, and along the shore another way, and two currents of water met at a certain point. Anywhere that water is running in currents that way, at the spot where two such currents meet, the water does not move too vigorously. All the sediment is likely to be deposited there, forming a sand bank. "And the forepart stuck fast and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves" (Acts 27:41). That will often happen. The ship ran up into a sand bank. The bow stayed solid but the stem was broken off because of the waves.

God's will was that they should land here. But the practical problems of landing were perilous, nonetheless. Just because God wants you to do a certain thing does not mean that difficulties do not occur. They will occur. Even if you are moving in God's will, it is still necessary to employ all the means and skill that you possibly can.

In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus told people to consider the fowl of the air. As a young Christian, I dismissed that in my mind as something rather impractical; no one could be that foolish. I had in mind that all the birds needed to do would be to fly up and sit on a fence post and then God would drop worms to them. "Your heavenly Father feedeth them." Yes, He does. How? He does not provide worms for them while they are sitting in the nest. He does not provide worms for them while they are sitting on a fence post someplace. The worms are in the ground, and the robin hunts from early morning till late at night. The Lord God has provided the worms for him but he has to go get them.

So with Paul traveling in this ship, they were coming in the will of God. They were all going to be saved. But the ship was broken (p.216) up on that island and they had to exercise themselves to come out safely. You may say, "Well, I thought God was going to bring them." He did! He brought them, but bringing them in did not mean that they were going to come in on a rocking chair. They had to work, but God blessed their work.

"And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape" (Acts 27:42). The Roman government had a terrific penalty if anyone allowed a prisoner to escape. It was better to kill them than to let them escape. "But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land" (Acts 27:43, 44).

That is the story. Paul's own conduct earlier now provided help for him.

"And when they were escaped [when the soldiers, sailors and everyone else had left the ship], then they knew that the island was called Melita" (Acts 28:1). It is called Melita in the Bible, but we call it Malta. Malta is in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, and not too far from Italy. "And the barbarous

people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold" (Acts 28:2). The term, "the barbarous people," does not mean these people were barbaric. This is a way of saying they were not Greeks nor Romans. It was customary to call anyone who was not a Roman nor a Greek a barbarian. These people lit a fire and helped those who were shipwrecked.

These voyagers had been thrown into the water and it was raining hard. The weather was cold, and they sorely needed the warmth of a fire.

"And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand" (Acts 28:3). Paul went out, tired as he was, and gathered sticks for a fire. Though he was a famous apostle and evangelist, he was one of those who went out to get material so that all could have the warmth of a bonfire. This is just a small glimpse into the humility of character which was Paul's. The serpent bit Paul while he was doing a good work. And here is a lesson for you and me -- to be doing good is no guarantee that trouble will not come to us. Calamities may occur at any time.

"And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, (p.217) whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live" (Acts 28:4). When they saw the snake bite Paul, they said at once that the gods must be angry with this man, because if they could not get him in the sea, they would get him this way. And today we share this common fallacy of judging from appearances. The barbarians saw the snake bite, and reasoned that the bitten man must be a bad man. That was an unwarranted, unnecessary and altogether unwise assumption.

"And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm" (Acts 28:5). There was no panic as far as Paul was concerned. "Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god" (Acts 28:6). When the snake bit him, they said, "See, he must be an awfully bad man." But when it turned out he was not harmed, then they said, "He must be a god." This draws to our attention the fickle nature of public opinion. You cannot go by what people say or think.

"In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, (in that area where they had been thrown on the shore), whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously" (Acts 28:7). The chief of the island treated them with kindness and consideration. "And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him" (Acts 28:8). This is a demonstration of the power of God with pagan people. "So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed: who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary" (Acts 28:9, 10). This went on for about three months. Day in and day out, Paul exercised his faith on their behalf in such a way that they came to look to him for benefits to be received. The faith that was exercised was Paul's faith; the men who were helped, however, were pagan men. When the Christian exercises his faith about anything, everyone else around him is benefited. There is a blessing for all those who are associated with true believers.

"And after three months, we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux" (Acts 28:11). The sign of these mythological characters, Castor and Pollux, was just a matter of identification. They flew that flag, as it were. "And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days. And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium. and after (p.218) one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli. where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome" (Acts 28:12-14).

These Christians kept looking for some other believers. When they got together, these other believers wanted them to stay with them seven days. This is the blessing of Christian fellowship. "And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage" (Acts 28:15). There was strength derived from the presence of other believers. As they traveled, Paul was quite friendly with the Roman soldiers, his captors. But anytime he saw a Christian, he was drawn to that Christian in a special way.

"And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him" (Acts 28:16). Paul received special consideration. If he had been a resentful rebellious man, do you think he would have gotten this kind of treatment? The fact that Paul conducted himself humbly and meekly helped him make friends.

"And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of. For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you; because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain" (Acts 28:17-20).

Paul came into the community as a prisoner of the Romans. I can imagine some people would not want to have anything to do with a preacher who had gotten into this kind of trouble. But the first thing he did was to call the chief of the Jews together and give a frank statement about the situation. He showed them the evidence that he was a man of God, but he also made it clear to them that he was being accused and he told them why.

"And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against" (Acts 28:21, 22). There was general opposition to the Gospel and against those who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. But as far as Paul was concerned, there was nothing against him (p.219) personally. When they said, "We know that every where it is spoken against," they quoted the kind of argument you will hear many times. When someone says everyone's against it, be careful. Popular comment is certainly unreliable.

"And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening" (Acts 28:23). This is a wonderful thumbnail sketch of Paul's presentation of the Gospel. This kingdom of God is a relationship wherein God rules in your heart. It is where you yield yourself to God and God will, by His Holy Spirit, bring the mind of Christ into you so that you are not your own. Paul persuaded them concerning Jesus, because Jesus of Nazareth had been the express image of God.

"And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not" (Acts 28:24). True preaching of the Gospel will not get a hundred per cent response. We cannot expect everyone to accept it. Some believe the things which are spoken and some believe not. But did you notice what Paul was actually doing? He was talking about the kingdom of God and he found this in the person of Jesus, but he argued it out of the law of Moses. He took the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and he talked about the things of the Lord Jesus. "And out of the prophets." He studied the prophets and preached to the people to show what the Messiah was actually like.

"And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers" (Acts 28:25). That is a remarkable insight into what Paul thought about the Bible. The Holy Spirit was the author and used the prophet as a means to get the message across. 'Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them" (Acts 28:26, 27). There are people who will listen and never believe. There are people who will hear the Gospel but they will not open their ears to actually understand it.

"Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" (Acts 28:28). This is a serious thing. It implies that God will not continue pressing people forever to turn to Him. Although some people, like the Jews, (p.220) knew the Scriptures, they were not willing to accept the Gospel "And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves" (Acts 28:29). They talked about it and talked about it. But it was fruitless, for the argument does not help.

"And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him" (Acts 28:30, 31). Paul was a prisoner because of his faithfulness in preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ, and all his life, after that day on the Damascus road, Paul had made his circumstances his pulpit. He did not change that habit now.

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This wonderful Book of the Acts of the Apostles closes with four striking words: "No man forbidding him." All the years of preaching and persecution, all the miles of missionary journeying, all the pain and sorrows, all the joy and blessing of Christian fellowship, which Paul valued so highly, all this was now in the past.

As a prisoner of Rome, Paul was unhindered now in his teaching of the wonderful grace of God who sent His Son to die for the sins of the world. No one any longer interfered with Paul's teaching of the resurrection and ascension, nor any of the other precious truths of our Christian faith.

Throughout the Book of the Acts, we see that no matter what the circumstances, no matter how difficult the way, He will give power, strength, peace of mind and heart, if you and I are faithfully resting in Him.

And for those outside of Christ? The challenge faces us to be unswerving in our witness in telling others about the Lord Jesus Christ. We have not been faced with imprisonment in this land of ours as we have taught the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ. We are unhindered by anything except our own indifference and neglect of the opportunities which are ours. God give us grace to press forward, while there is yet time! (p.221)