

PLAIN TALK
ON

Peter

By Dr. Manford George Gutzke

Table of Contents – Peter

1. Peter The Man	2
2. Peter The Fisherman	4
3. Peter As A Jew	7
4. Peter The Disciple	9
5. Peter And His Call	12
6. Peter, As An Apostle	14
7. Peter In Training	16
8. Peter Learns About Prayer (1)	19
9. Peter Learns About Prayer (2)	22
10. Peter Learns To Follow (1)	25
11. Peter Learns To Follow (2)	27
12. Peter And Faith	29
13. Peter And Self-Confidence	31
14. Peter And Denial Of His Lord	33
15. Peter And His Interceding Lord	35
16. Peter And Foot-Washing	37
17. Peter And Violence	39
18. Peter And Going Fishing	41
19. Peter And His Lord	43
20. Peter And His Commission	45
21. Peter And The World	47
22. Peter And The Jewish Court	50
23. Peter And Sin In The Church	53
24. Peter And The Samaritans	56
25. Peter And Missions	58
26. Peter And Tradition	61
27. Peter In Prison	64
28. Peter And Church Councils	66
29. Peter And Paul	68
30. Peter And The Unity Of The Church	71

PLAIN TALK ON PUAL – PAGE 73

Chapter 1

Peter The Man

In Matthew we read these words:

And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbeus, whose surname was Thaddeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him. These twelve Jesus sent forth (Matthew 10:1-5).

The Gospel presents Jesus Christ as the incarnate Word of God. We read "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The Gospel reveals 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). And again, "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son" (Galatians 4:4).

Our primary attention in the Gospel is called to focus upon Jesus Christ the Son of God.

For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake (I Thessalonians 1:5).

Thus the revelation was not only in the words of the apostles, but in the actual performance among men on the part of those who had been commissioned to be the witnesses of the truth of God's saving work.

We are going to study the testimony of one of these apostles who has been named, "the first, Simon, who is called Peter." No doubt each of the apostles was in himself a unique person. They were not all identical with each other. Peter will exhibit some individual characteristics peculiar only to himself, but they all had similar experiences with their Lord. Individual believers are each unique persons. Yet being saved means the same for each. In the case of Peter we have more personal references in the Gospels than any other person who believed in Christ Jesus, that is, outside of references about Christ Jesus Himself. While we do have more report about Paul's personal experience in coming to faith and in his understanding of the meaning of grace than we have of any other person, we have more descriptions of Peter in his personal conduct as a disciple than we have of anyone else. There is more revealed of Peter's own human nature and this may be the reason so many Bible readers feel they can identify themselves more readily with Peter.

At this point a word of caution seems to be in order. Just because we are given more evidence of his human nature it is easy to slip into the frame of mind where Peter is esteemed as being something less by comparison with the other apostles. This would be an error in the light of the scriptural record. In all the listing of the apostles, Peter is mentioned first every time. It is true that his words are often quoted as the mind of the apostolic group but we read "Likewise also said all the disciples." In a particular situation Peter might be quoted, but, as I say, then you will find something to indicate they all agreed with what he said.

This prominence may have been the natural consequence of his impulsive nature. He seemed prone to respond promptly to any apparent challenge. One can feel his honesty, his bold courage, as well as his limitations in judgment. When his Master would point toward action in obedience to the will of His heavenly Father, Peter would appraise that guidance from his human point of view. Then he would propose a course of action that seemed wise in his human opinion, even if it would have been less than God wanted. At such times Peter was corrected, but not condemned. Peter's personal spiritual experience will always be a source of comfort to many believers today.

Despite his repeated tendency to respond with lesser obedience to the will of God in his own ignorance

and human weakness, he was never rejected. He was never dismissed from his commission to serve. Peter is a grand example of the change that was effective in the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

The trial and crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth occurred less than two months before Pentecost. At the time of the trial, Peter is to be seen at his lowest ebb. It was then that he denied his Lord, yet within two months on the Day of Pentecost, Peter stood up boldly and preached the Gospel when three thousand persons were converted. There is much reported of Peter in the Book of Acts telling of the opposition that he encountered, the persecution which he endured gladly for Christ's sake. But there is not the least hint that he ever faltered in his personal witness for Christ.

It is true that later on occasion Peter allowed personal consideration to affect his public conduct in a way that seemed to Paul that it would compromise the Gospel. It appears that Paul chided Peter for the lapse in testimony in Galatians 2:11-14. But in his second epistle Peter showed his personal esteem of Paul was not affected. Peter wrote: "Even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you" (II Peter 3:15).

We are given no indication about Peter's personal experience before he met Jesus of Nazareth. We do know that he was a fisherman by trade. We can assume that he shared normal Jewish family life. Just how that would prepare him to serve as an apostle is beyond our knowledge. It is conceivable that traditions were passed on within the family by word of mouth, because the written Scriptures would be in the care of the priests and the scribes. This leads us to the view that the public teaching and preaching of Jesus of Nazareth would attract some followers known as disciples. Out of this company the apostles were chosen.

We have never been given any idea as to what personal traits or personality, if any, were involved in that choice. We can feel sure that God prepared His servants, but we have no clue as to what features of the personality, if any, were involved. We can recognize that when Peter preached at Pentecost, he was aware of Old Testament prophecy. We can see that when Peter was commanded in the vision upon the housetop that he should enter the house of a Gentile, he protested because he had never broken the tradition of food or fellowship. At that time he was able to say "To him give all the prophets witness" (Acts 10:43). Apparently by that time, after three years as a disciple, he was acquainted with the Old Testament prophecy.

The epistles of Peter were written probably later in his life but their text shows that Peter had a grasp of the message of the Gospel in Old Testament prophecy. It is impressive to note that he could deal with such significant themes as salvation in I Peter 1:9-12, and the end of the world in II Peter 3, and leave the impression of competent grasp of such truths. Even when he stood in court the learned authorities were astonished at the boldness of Peter and John, when they perceived that they were unlearned, and ignorant men. Ignorant of human knowledge Peter might have been, but he was not stupid. Any believer can be inspired to witness with confidence when he reads this about Peter.

Chapter 2

Peter The Fisherman

Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men (Luke 5:10).

These were the words that were spoken to Peter by our Lord. It will always be one of the amazing aspects of the Gospel record that the man who became the leading apostle and the preacher on that memorable occasion at Pentecost was a fisherman, untrained in academic pursuits, and unrelated to the ecclesiastical structure that prevailed among the Jews. This was a layman. He had been called while he was a layman to become an apostle of Jesus Christ. He was then confronted by a hostile establishment of intellectual and ecclesiastical leaders who embodied the governing power of the Jewish people.

He conducted himself before these dignitaries in such a way that it was written:

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

When we recall the humble circumstances of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth at Bethlehem, where as an infant He was laid in a manger, it seems fitting that the leading apostle should have been a fisherman by trade. It should be noted that when Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost he manifested a grasp of the Old Testament. But it should not be forgotten that he had spent perhaps three years in fellowship with Jesus of Nazareth who undoubtedly used the Old Testament in His instruction of His disciples.

The significance of the call of Peter, the fisherman, to be an apostle is profoundly important. It seems obvious that one does not need advanced sophisticated learning to the literature of men to have an authoritative grasp of Gospel truth, nor is it necessary to be a part of ecclesiastical authority to have authority for Gospel preaching and teaching. It seems that Saul the Pharisee as a young man was authorized to appraise the conduct of Jews who confessed to faith in Jesus Christ, even to the point of arresting them to put them in prison for their irregular behavior. And Saul was called to be an apostle. Paul was accused in court, "much learning doth make thee mad." There can be no doubt that Paul who sat at the feet of Gamaliel was a man with a highly trained intellect. He evidently used that intellect in writing his epistles. Now he was one of the apostles, but even so Peter was an apostle.

In Peter we have a man recognized as a leader in the early church with all the authority of Gospel truth who had no intellectual training nor any ecclesiastical authority. He was recognized as being unlearned and ignorant, and yet he was the practical leader of the early church whose membership is reported in thousands. Though Peter had denied his Lord on the night of His trial, it was Peter who led the company of disciples in the selection of the twelfth apostle. Even more impressively it was Peter who interpreted the meaning of Pentecost when three thousand people were converted. It was Peter who exercised his faith in the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate. It was Peter who confronted the Jewish authorities to witness to the power of the name of the risen, glorified Lord when he gave his testimony about the healing of the lame man saying:

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 3:16).

That is the way Peter plainly put it.

When the Jewish authorities undertook to outlaw preaching the Gospel, it was Peter who was cast into prison and beaten. It was Peter who was miraculously delivered from prison that he might continue his witnessing. When the Gospel was preached and received in Samaria, the early church at Jerusalem was so concerned about the welfare of the new converts in Samaria, that they sent responsible men to minister the Holy Ghost to them that they might be established in their faith. They sent Peter and John. It was Peter who dealt with Simon the Sorcerer warning him to repent that he might be forgiven. And when sin

appeared among the believers in the conduct of Ananias and Sapphira, it was Peter who confronted them with his accusation of their sin. One should be careful in noting in this incident that all Peter did was to witness to the truth. But he did this with total authority.

I am sharing these thoughts with you as we are summarizing the amazing significance of this man who in actual, practical life outside of his personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ was a fisherman by trade. To think that this man reached such prominence and such significance is most impressive. The narrative of the events in the early church and in the missionary outreach is by no means comprehensive nor exhaustive. In other words, many things doubtless happened among them that are not recorded. Little mention is made of the witnessing of the other apostles. We do know that after the death of Stephen, it is written:

And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles (Acts 8:1).

The record is triumphant. "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

We next read of Peter when he was imprisoned by Herod the king. Apparently he was being held there to be killed. The early church gathered to pray for him. We read "Prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." I do not think they were asking for his release. James the brother of John had been killed and they probably expected the same fate for Peter. When Peter appeared at the house of Mary the mother of John where many were gathered together praying, he was unexpected. They did not think it could be true that he was out of his prison.

The next event in which Peter's name appears is the first church council which met in Jerusalem to consider the problem of Gentiles in the church. Here we find again that Peter has the major part in the proceedings. He opened the discussion by testifying of his experience with Cornelius the Centurion, thus paving the way for Barnabas and Paul to tell what had been done through their preaching to bring the Gentiles to faith. In Paul's epistle to the Galatians, Peter is again referred to as one of the important leaders of the church. Paul recounted how he had gone up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and to meet Peter and they spent fifteen days with him. And here in the epistle to the Galatians is the record that Peter was unduly influenced by his Jewish association and that Paul was obliged to correct him because his conduct did not coincide with the truth as Peter himself knew it. I always like to remember in this connection that in his second epistle written late in his life, Peter referred to Paul as "our beloved brother Paul."

Later in this series, we will look more closely into the two epistles of Peter to note how authoritatively he deals with profound spiritual truths. He discusses salvation, and discusses the end of and such significance is most impressive. The narrative of the training in the Scriptures as literature. He was what was considered as an unlearned and ignorant man. When we summarize all these things that I have mentioned here, we are made conscious of the fact that in serving God in the Gospel, the qualification for this service does not depend upon previous training in human understanding. Rather it depends upon personal commitment to God and a personal commission from God. Almighty God called Peter through the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ to the service that he was to render. He was to be a catcher of man, a fisher of men, and this he became, even though as we have been pointing out there is no evidence that he had any special training along this line.

And at the same time I am glad to bring in for our consideration the testimony about Paul. Now Paul was highly trained. He was what we would call a very well educated man so much so that he was accused in court that: "much learning doth make thee mad." Even so, Paul became a very earnest and sincere witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. But so did Peter and this is sufficient to bring to our minds that when it comes to serving God and it comes to witnessing for the Lord Jesus Christ, we are not dependent upon our personal rating so far as human beings are concerned. We need just to be spokesman for the Lord and to

be witnesses unto Him according to what light has been shown unto us. This is the way in which I can understand the significance of how Peter the fisherman became the great apostle.

Chapter 3

Peter As A Jew

In the Book of Acts we read these words:

On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: and he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, 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 four footed 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. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven (Acts 10:9-16).

In these words we see something of Peter, the Jew: "I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." This was his testimony while he was having this vision on the housetop. Peter was a Jew and could claim a perfect record in observance of Jewish customs.

We have no description of the family life in which Peter grew up. We do have the testimony of his recollection. He had kept all the traditions the Jews had standardized into codes of conduct. In their desire to stay away from anything unclean, the Jews had developed certain rules about their food. Some foods were named as clean. Meat which came from such specified animals that had been killed in a specifically authorized manner was known as "kosher", all else was not kosher and that meant it was not fit to be eaten as food. This was the problem in his vision on the housetop. In his dream he saw, as it were, a great sheet let down from heaven with many creatures of all sort, both kosher and unclean. When he was instructed "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat" Peter protested "Not so, Lord: for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean." This happened three times.

The Jews also had developed rules that limited their social association with Gentiles. Their strict rules forbade any Jew to enter the house of a Gentile. Peter had made it a practice to observe this rule. When he did obey the direct guidance of God to go into the house of Cornelius, the Centurion, who was a Gentile, Peter felt obliged when he got back to his home church to explain carefully to his fellow church members the circumstances which led him to do this act which was in violation of Jewish custom. I think we have ample evidence to think that Peter was a good Jew in that he had been brought up observing the traditions and keeping himself as one who honored the customs of his people. Peter had to learn that the Gospel released him from this restriction, but also called him into an obedience to the law of God, which was at once more liberal than his Jewish customs, but more demanding than his Jewish conduct. In all this Peter is a wonderful example of someone brought up in a religious home with certain specific prejudices against certain common social practices, while at the same time having no real personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord. In our society there are homes of professing Christians who have adopted certain attitudes condemning some social practices while the family maintains no personal relationship with the Lord Himself. Some of us can remember when the members of some denominations would not participate in the country dances that were a common practice in our society. Others would not attend the theatre because they judged such actions were sin. Others would not play cards even without gambling. These attitudes were sustained by social pressure rather than by any spiritual conviction and becoming regenerated as born again believers in Christ.

Such persons would have an experience very similar to that of Peter. Peter had to learn that the Gentiles could also become believers and be saved. This would be as amazing to Peter as it would be for a very faithful member of the Pentecostal denomination to learn that an Episcopalian who attended dances and who played cards might become a real born again believer in Jesus Christ. Such attitudes and opinions are not easily set aside. In Peter's case we read in Paul's epistle to the Galatians that on occasion Peter was

influenced to conform his conduct to Jewish custom to such an extent that Paul was obliged to correct him. It appears even Barnabas was also influenced to conform to Jewish custom. The record is notable in Galatians.

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified (Galatians 2:11-16).

That is the way Paul could describe it. The old prejudices and critical judgments may persist as they did in Peter's case and Barnabas' case, even when we know that they are a hindrance to the Gospel. There need be no suspicion as to Peter's personal loyalty to Christ as his Savior, even though he permitted his conduct to be influenced by his personal association with his Jewish countrymen. We can get some idea of how powerful that influence is when we read "And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation" (Galatians 2:13).

There are several lessons to learn here. First, we should be very careful that we do not accept as the guidance of God ideas that we have cherished from our group customs, our denominational peculiarities. I am quite sure that I have heard Presbyterian believers explain that the reason they could not accept certain teaching which recognized the truth of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, was that their Presbyterian pastors in whom they had every confidence did not preach or teach the importance nor the reality of that spiritual experience.

I remember so vividly an occasion when I was criticized openly and severely because I preached on the basis of the Scripture as found in the book of Acts, that Jesus Christ would return visibly in person. The Scripture says "In like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." When I reasoned with my critic, because I was sharply criticized for preaching this, that this was the plain meaning of the written Scripture, this woman stoutly maintained that it was not the view which her mother had taught her. So far as I remember she continued stubbornly to hold her mother's mistaken view as the real truth of God.

At the same time, we should be careful that we do not permit ourselves to condemn as totally unreliable the witness of some one who may allow childhood ideas to obscure some aspects of personal testimony. You know we may possibly come in touch with people that are completely dominated by the fact that they belong to a certain denomination, and they have the views of that denomination. Because we know that that is limiting, we know that that is not the way it is in Scripture, we would be very tempted to think that they are not real believers. That is not true. Believers are human beings, and their human frailties may show up on occasion and in ways that may need correction, without damaging their witness that Jesus Christ is their personal Savior. And that is the way we can feel it would have been with Peter.

There never was any question in the time that Peter was an apostle and after Pentecost when he preached as he did, and then went out and was a witness and a missionary as he was, there never was any question about Peter's faith. You will recall even during that time how he was used to raise a young woman from the dead. He had power and he really belonged to the Lord but that did not keep him as a Jew having Jewish background, from having certain customs and certain manner of doing things which caused him to act the way the Jews acted. And this we learned when we are thinking of Peter as a Jew.

Chapter 4

Peter The Disciple

And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone (John 1:42).

These are the words with which Jesus of Nazareth greeted Simon Peter. When He said "Thou shalt be called Cephas" that is the Greek word for stone, like "petra" or "Peter" is the Latin word for stone. I have always been intrigued by the fact that the name "Simon" is so similar to the word "simoon" which is the name given to a sand storm. I can feel that Simon implies sand whereas Peter means rock. I am especially interested in the chemical elements of sand and rock because they are the same. Yet there is a classic difference between the physical properties of sand and the physical properties of rock. This is manifested in the contrast between sand and rock when you consider it as a foundation on which to build. Jesus of Nazareth pointed out that a house built upon sand would collapse in time of storm, whereas a house built upon a rock would remain intact despite the storm.

In the career of Simon Peter there is evidence that this man was apparently unstable in his personality when he first became a disciple. We read of the occasion when Jesus of Nazareth came to the disciples, walking on the water during a storm, and Peter said,

Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me (Matthew 14:28-30).

He had the temerity to start walking on the water, but he did not have the faith to continue.

Apparently Peter was influenced by his own human tendencies. He was inclined to heed the call of Jesus to become one of His disciples, and he exercised faith in obedience to the guidance of Jesus of Nazareth. On one occasion when the Lord was in Peter's boat speaking to the multitudes standing on the shore, we read:

Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net (Luke 5:4-5).

Here we see that although Peter's experienced judgment as a fisherman was that it was unlikely that any fish would be caught, yet he had such respect for Jesus of Nazareth that when the Lord said "Let down the net" Simon was willing to do so despite his own skepticism. This is a classic example of an act of faith.

Though he personally had no confidence there would be any good results, yet because the Lord told him to do it, he would obey. The account goes on to record "And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake." This experience so affected Simon Peter that he fell down at Jesus' knees saying, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." It is remarkable that we read "And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him" (Luke 5:10-11). We can all note that Peter was thus called to be a disciple even though he still had much to learn. He seemed to have all confidence in Jesus of Nazareth as indicated when he made his great confession: "He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:15-16). And yet he did not even then understand fully what was involved.

When Jesus of Nazareth told His disciples that as He now went up to Jerusalem the rulers would arrest Him and kill Him,

Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offense unto me: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men (Matthew 16:22-23).

Here we see that Peter had been called to be a disciple, even an apostle, while he was still thinking like a man, in human judgment. This can be an important insight into the experience of servants of the Lord. It appears that a person can be actually called to serve the Lord while he is not yet a mature believer. I found this for myself very, very stirring. Just think of it, you do not have to wait until you know everything to become a servant of the Lord. You only need to hear His call. And if He asks you to come and to serve Him, that is what you are to do. It may turn out that you do not know everything. You may even be conscious of that fact but if He calls you, the thing to do is to come, and that is what Peter did.

Some time later as His earthly career was nearing its end, Jesus of Nazareth told His disciples that He would personally be struck down with the result that all His disciples would forsake Him and be scattered. Peter spoke up immediately to say that he would never forsake the Lord, even though all others did so. The Lord then told him that before another day had dawned Peter would deny Him three times.

Peter's denial took place just as predicted, but other developments happened even before this. On the last night Jesus of Nazareth was with His disciples, He spent several hours in Gethsemane. He took with Him into the garden Peter, James and John. While his Master was praying Peter fell asleep. This happened at least twice. Then as they came out of the garden Jesus of Nazareth was betrayed into the hands of the Roman soldiers. At this point Peter wanted to fight to protect his Master. There can be no question of his courage: single handedly he attacked the company of Roman soldiers. But he was wrong. This was not the way to serve the Lord. And we can pause there for a moment and reflect on this.

It is not unfair to say that when he could have been praying Peter was sleeping. And then when he could have been yielding, Peter wanted to fight. That always follows. People who are not so fully aware of the actual presence of the Lord are inclined to feel it is up to them. They have to do something about it. And this is the way it was with Peter.

Only a short time later in the same night Peter denied that he ever knew of Jesus of Nazareth. This is the culmination of a course of action that had been entirely human. When he advised Jesus of Nazareth not to go up to Jerusalem and not to allow the rulers to put Him to death, Peter was thinking like a man. When he boasted that he would never forsake his Master, he was talking in self confidence like a man, entirely honest but utterly human. When Peter fell asleep while his Master was praying he was altogether human. And when he wanted to fight to protect Jesus of Nazareth Peter acted like a man. And so when he denied he belonged to the company of disciples in the presence of the soldiers, he again acted as a man.

We should not overlook that Peter followed Jesus of Nazareth when He was arrested and brought before the chief priest to be tried for blasphemy, but it is to be noted also that he "followed afar off."

This whole sad succession of events left Peter weeping bitterly. But it is very important to remember that the risen Lord sent a special word to Peter to come to Him in Galilee after He was raised from the dead. And we are told that the Lord dealt personally with Peter to direct him in his future service. Three times the Lord asked Peter "Lovest thou me?" Three times Peter responded "Thou knowest I do." And then Peter was told "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep."

In due time on the day of Pentecost, Peter with the others was filled with the Holy Spirit. On that day he preached and three thousand persons were converted. Later when he was forbidden to preach, Peter stoutly announced that he would obey God. This he did, and when they beat him, Peter rejoiced "that he was counted worthy to suffer for His name."

This man who in human weakness denied his Lord before a few soldiers, only a few weeks afterwards, courageously faced the whole Jewish authority and openly confessed his faith in Christ Jesus in the strength of the Holy Spirit. Our hearts are humbled when we reflect on all these things that we can see in the record of Peter the disciple. How marvelously the Lord overcame his weakness and filled him with

His own Holy Spirit so that Peter became truly a rock of strength in the early church.

Chapter 5

Peter And His Call

In thinking about Peter it is helpful to remember he is counted both as a disciple and as an apostle. That is not exactly the same. The disciple is a pupil, a learner. You can be recruited to listen and thus you become a disciple. A disciple follows the Teacher, the Master. And then of the disciple certain persons were chosen to be apostles. These were individuals chosen to be sent out with authority to represent the Lord. They were the apostles. In other words, Peter was first a disciple for some length of time, we do not know how long. Then as a disciple he was called to be an apostle. This comes to our mind as we read these verses in Luke:

And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, and saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: and so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him (Luke 5:1-11).

We count that this is the point in which Peter was called to be an apostle, when he was called to follow Him to become fishers of men. In the course of this incident that we have just read, it is easy to notice it was obvious that Peter's own personal judgment based on his knowledge of fishing was negative. He did not expect any fish, but at the same time his confidence in Jesus of Nazareth prompted him to obey even though he had no expectation of any results. This is a classic example of an act of faith. When you act in faith it is not because you think things are going to turn out: it is not your own personal judgment that is involved. The faith that you exercise is not in your knowledge of the situation or your expectation. The faith must be centered in Jesus of Nazareth. "At thy word, I will let down the net." And I often think that so far as Peter is concerned, surely as you read you get the impression that here was this fisherman doing something that he felt personally was utterly useless. He did not think there were any fish out there. He thought he knew. They had fished all night and had not taken any. The fish were not running in that part of the lake. That was the way in which Peter would feel. But he had such a respect for Jesus of Nazareth that when Jesus of Nazareth told him to let down the net: "at thy word, I will let down the net." And of course, as the record shows, the result was amazing, astonishing. They enclosed a great multitude of fishes.

This so affected Peter that he was smitten in self criticism. We read "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." I have a feeling that he thought he was sinful because he had doubted. I really think that deep down in his heart he did not expect any results. It is striking to note that just when he came to the lowest point in his own personal self esteem it was then that he was called to be an apostle. The Lord speaking to him said "Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men." This man did not expect anything. But he would do what he was told.

There are several important observations here. High self esteem is not necessary to become a servant of Christ. You do not have to feel that you amount to anything to become a servant of Christ. Your accurate estimate of potential results is not necessary. Now let me go over that again in my own mind. If I am called to serve the Lord and I try to establish that there are going to be certain results, that is a mistaken line of thought. I can remember in the days when I was called to leave the law office, and to give myself over

to telling the Gospel story in the world (I had no idea I would ever preach), I expected to go as a missionary. But when that time came and I was in prayer about it, I remember how I wanted to get from the Lord the promise that there would be one soul turn to God. But I can remember how when I was praying about it, I could not get any assurance. I could not get any assurance that there would ever be one soul saved because of my testimony. The only assurance that I got was the Lord gave me to understand that He understood me; that if I went for His name's sake, that would be all that He wanted. I can remember that so well.

But at that time I did not know about this incident with Peter. I think it would have encouraged me if I had noted that when Peter himself did not expect any results, but he did what he was told, this is what happened. Obedience to the guidance of the Lord is essential. I do not need to be absolutely sure I am going to have results. I do not need to start counting up the numbers of the people who are going to respond. There may not be anything like that. But I can obey and obedience to the guidance of the Lord is essential.

Action in line with the guidance of the Lord is important. Now notice the course of events as we have gone over it so far. A disciple is a learner. It does not mean he has to learn everything before he is eligible to serve. He can actually be at a stage where he knows nothing of what is about to happen, but he is now able to recognize the significance of what does happen, because he has put his trust in the Lord. This all shows that the servants of the Lord are not chosen for what they know, or what they expect, or what they have done. It is probably fair to note that their personal record and ability is not the basis of the choice. When God calls you to do something, that is not because you amount to anything, and not because you are somebody great or because you have peculiar gifts or abilities. Simply He wants you to do what He wants you to do. The prospective servant is not chosen because of what he knows or what he has done but one characteristic is important, the prospective servant must be ready to obey.

There is no indication that Peter was immediately given an assignment. Mark tells us:

And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him. And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils (Mark 3:13-15).

There is no intimation that these were men with natural abilities which they could use to serve the Lord. They were to be men with power, but that power was to be the power of God.

The first step in preparing them for their service was that they should be with Him. It is probable that the first thing that any of them would undertake is to deny self. This seems practically impossible. It is almost like trying to get away from one's own shadow. But the presence of the Lord makes it easier to realize because Christ in you is the hope of glory. It becomes a matter of yielding to Him. Then it seems that giving in and giving up are just the very things that you want to do. When the soul feels the thrill of being in heaven at the right hand of God, there is such joy that it fills the heart with desire to tell the whole world that anybody "whosoever will may come and whosoever cometh He will in no wise cast out." Suddenly communion with God and fellowship with the saints become very precious.

All the things of this world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life seem to be very trashy by comparison. There is no feeling of loss when one thinks of setting aside the things of this world, but there is a sense of great riches when one realizes that the soul can enjoy the blessedness of God's presence forever. So you see being with Him is very, very important in the matter of serving Him. And this was the first step in preparing the apostles for their work. From among His disciples Christ chose twelve men and ordained them that they should be with Him. That is the part that we have noticed thus far. And so it was with Peter. He was called to be with the Lord and as a result of being with the Lord he would be able to act and serve in the power of God because God was with him.

Chapter 6

Peter, As An Apostle

We are thinking of Peter as an apostle. Peter had been a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth for some time when he was ordained as an apostle as it is written:

And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him. And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils (Mark 3:13-15).

We have noted how the first aspect of being an apostle was to be with the Lord. Together with being aware of fellowship with God comes a consciousness of what God could do for human beings. There is an awareness of God's compassion as He looks upon suffering human beings. Then the disciple is moved to yield to the will of God, and finds in himself the Lord taking the sickness out of the human body. The eternal truth is that "He is touched with the feelings of our infirmities" and by the grace of God He is able to "take our infirmities."

In his ministry as an apostle Peter came into confrontation with Satan and was given the power to "cast out devils." There is much that remains obscure about this aspect of serving the Lord in our time, but there can be no doubt about the testimony of Scripture. In the book of Acts we read the record of the works which the apostles performed. Then we read of the works of Philip as he preached the Gospel to the Samaritans. We read in Acts:

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 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 8:5-8).

I want you to notice in that passage of Scripture (Acts 8:6) that those people of Samaria did not attend to the words of Philip because they were well spoken. It was not because he was a great orator, and it was not because he had some unusual understanding, that he opened the eyes of their understanding. No, it was hearing and seeing the miracles which he performed. This was the basis of the confidence of the people. So they believed Philip and they accepted his message because of results that followed his preaching.

When the church of Jerusalem heard that many Samaritans had come to faith, they were concerned that these new converts should receive the Holy Spirit. And so we read again in Acts:

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).

This is a very interesting aspect; but we are interested just now that the early church sent Peter as one of those who was to go down and to lead these new converts into this deeper spiritual experience.

When sin appeared in the early church in the deception of Ananias and Sapphira, it was Peter who challenged them. We can read that in the book of Acts in the fifth chapter. This is such a striking incident and it has deep significance for us. We read:

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, 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. 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? While 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. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. 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? 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. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things (Acts 5:1-11).

This is a very amazing incident because it is so important for us to realize that our conduct in our churches is open and seen by Almighty God. He looks on the heart and if anything is not sincere, if it is not honest, if it is not straightforward, Almighty God counts that a sin.

We read even more of the works of Peter as an apostle in the book of Acts:

And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, 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 Sharon saw him, and turned to the Lord. Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and alms deeds which she did. And 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. 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. 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 showing 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 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 9:32-43).

This is an amazing record, and it belongs to Peter. I wanted to share it with you that you might feel it.

Even though Peter had such power as an apostle, the scriptures show that he held this excellency in an earthen vessel. Despite all that the Lord had shown him we find that he could be influenced by human consideration to the extent that Paul had to correct him. We read this in the book of Galatians:

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews (Galatians 2:11-14)?

In this we can feel that although Peter had power and he was actually responsible as a servant of the Lord, it does not mean that everything that Peter did was always letter perfect.

Chapter 7

Peter In Training

We have already noted that Peter was ordained to be an apostle before he knew all that there was to learn about the ways of God. However, serving God not only needs willingness but also an understanding of all that is involved. Peter was committed in his heart to obey the Lord, but it was important also that he understand the meaning of what he was doing.

At the time Peter was told "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men" we read that he acted promptly. "And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him" (Luke 5:11). It appears that later Peter wanted to understand what this involved in a practical way.

During the time that Peter followed Jesus of Nazareth he learned much about the ways of God. We are given an account of how he learned about forgiveness. We read in the Gospel of Matthew:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them (Matthew 18:15-20).

It would appear that estrangement between brethren is to be avoided if at all possible. In the illustration given by Jesus of Nazareth the injured party should seek to remove the cause for ill will. This is important because lingering ill will could block mutual agreement in praying, and this is very important in spiritual service. "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).

Realizing that one handicap could be the continuing wrong doing of the other person Peter raised a practical question. "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" He received his amazing answer, "Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times: but until seventy times seven." There is to be no limit. Then the Lord Jesus told a parable to illustrate the truth.

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshiped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him a hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses (Matthew 18:23-35).

The believer in Christ is to be aware of how God has forgiven him, and he is to consider that the wrong he suffered from his brother was much less than the sin against God, which God forgives in the Gospel.

The believer is to forgive the wrongdoing brother in the same way that God has forgiven him. Paul wrote to the believers in Ephesus:

And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you (Ephesians 4:30-32).

Thus Peter learned a very important element in spiritual living. This is an aspect of "love one another" which was to feature the life of all believers. Jesus of Nazareth taught: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that he also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35). There can be no doubt that "forgiving" one another is involved in "loving" one another.

On the occasion that Jesus of Nazareth instructed the rich young ruler to turn away from his worldly possessions that he might serve the Lord, Peter raised the question about what happens when a soul does turn away from this world's goods to be free to serve the Lord. We read:

Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in thee throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life (Matthew 19:27-29).

I have never felt that this question from Peter necessarily implied that Peter was having any "second thoughts" about his choice to follow the Lord. I think it could very well be just what it is reported to be, a sincere practical interest on Peter's part on what was likely to follow their action in responding to the call of God.

In the answer given by Jesus of Nazareth it seems obviously implied that such turning away from human worldly interests would result in the terminating of some natural, human relationships. On one occasion Jesus of Nazareth had warned that following Him could mean the breaking of human ties. He said:

For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household (Matthew 10:35-36).

Mark reports this teaching even more simply and directly (Mark 10:28-31). Luke also records this incident (Luke 18:28-30). There is no reason to misunderstand the sober truth. Following the Lord as a disciple and witnessing for the Lord as an apostle, may very likely mean that some human bonds will be broken. Jesus of Nazareth dealt with this issue very plainly saying:

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me (Matthew 10:37).

Something of this truth was implied when Jesus of Nazareth was told that His mother and His brethren wanted to speak with Him. And He said:

Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? . . . For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother (Matthew 12:48-50)

One can say simply that spiritual relationships have priority over natural relationships.

It is easy to see that this is readily unpopular in the world. The animosity among worldly persons against Jesus Christ is very natural. The soul that turns to God turns away from the world. This was the truth Peter came to know when he asked his penetrating question: "We have forsaken all . . . what do we get?" The fact is that forsaking all human relationships can be very negative, but this is not all the truth. Because as we read the fact is "And everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father,

or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (Matthew 19:29).

This truth has very broad implications. It becomes a sharp problem in a home if either husband or wife continues to be enamored with the world, while the other spouse becomes spiritually minded. The one may want to spend Sunday at the lake, whereas the other may want to attend church. The one may want to spend money on a holiday weekend while the other may want that money to go to missions. This can become a serious issue, even to the point of causing the breakup of the family. It becomes very difficult when a spiritually minded wife wants to be submissive to her husband who demands that she act contrary to her understanding of the will of God. This is a point where I think it is important to note that Paul writes "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" (Ephesians 5:21). And he writes: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22). And again "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord" (Colossians 3:18).

It appears that this will still mean that in the decision as to how a believer should act there will need to be guidance in the Holy Spirit. But the problem is grounded in the fact that this world and that world are opposed to each other. They are different and they are not equal. The spiritual world has the priority for a believer in Christ.

Chapter 8

Peter Learns About Prayer (1)

As we study the record of Peter as it is written in the New Testament it could be well to have in mind that he was a normal, typical disciple and apostle of Jesus Christ. There is no doubt that he was a leader, but he was not different. He was one of the group. We are so often reminded of his human traits that we could easily overlook the fact that he was one of the inner circle who gathered around the Lord.

Time and again we read that Jesus of Nazareth took with Him Peter, James and John when He was about to perform some special act of power and grace. Nevertheless, Peter was still only the human being he was. The ministry that Peter performed was never a function of his personal character. The works were done in Peter and through Peter but always by the power of God. This is to be seen in the matter of praying.

In the New Testament we have the profound record of Jesus of Nazareth praying in Gethsemane, just before He was arrested by the Roman soldiers. And there in Matthew chapter 26 we read as follows:

Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then said he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold he is at hand that doth betray me (Matthew 26:36-46).

"The Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." This whole incident is so natural. It is easy for us to identify with the disciples. We should not forget that Peter was only human after all. It appears that Jesus of Nazareth spent an hour in prayer when He said "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" Apparently this continued through three periods. It appears that the disciples fell asleep each time. This is easier understood when it is remembered that the Lord continued in prayer for an hour each time.

Anyone who has ever been in a prolonged prayer meeting in which praying would be continuous for an hour at a time will readily understand how the disciples might get to be sleepy. The Word of the Lord is most illuminating when He said "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." As we face the issues of living we have two elements in our response, the spiritual as we think of God, and the carnal, the flesh, as we think of ourselves. All we have in the spirit inclines us to want the will of God. All that we are in our own human nature inclines us to want what will please us, our own ideas, our own selves. In thinking of self we have little inclination to deny ourselves. Thus we could actually want the will of God to be done in our spirit, but inasmuch as that would mean self denial, we find that our human nature is not ready to act. Thus it could be true that we want the benefits of being saved by the grace of God, but we are not willing to take the first step which would be self denial.

This would be true not only in praying, but in the whole round of living. In every issue of life we would find ourselves not inclined in the last analysis to deny self. We would actually find ourselves holding back from denying self because we wanted some personal satisfaction out of that particular situation.

We are not given any personality description of Peter. We have no character sketch of him. But we can note some things about his career. We see him in the upper room after the ascension of Jesus of Nazareth.

Here we see that Peter did not lean on his own understanding in choosing the twelfth apostle to take the place of Judas. He acted as leader and we read the record:

And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen (Acts 1:24)

Peter shared in the ten day prayer meeting which the disciples held after the ascension of Jesus to heaven while they waited for "the promise of the Father." There is no mention of him in any special personal way, but when general confusion followed the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, it was Peter who came forward and preached his great sermon. He explained what had happened by expounding the Old Testament Scripture to show that what had happened was simply a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

We get the impression that Peter was a man with regular habits of prayer. For instance we read "Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer" (Acts 3:1). This was the place and the time for public praying, and Peter recognized that it was. There is a truth here that we should not miss. Peter went to pray in the temple, even though the leaders did not believe as he did. Should a person go to worship in a church when the preacher does not believe the whole Bible? Should you have any part with that? It is possible. By all means you should join in public worship in God, and if the public worship of God in your community happens to be in that particular church, then you would go there. And if it turns out that they do not know as much about the Gospel as you do, then you will watch your opportunity to witness to them. You are not going there to worship the people, you are going there to worship God.

When Peter and John were confronted by the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, Peter did not at that time take time to pray to the Lord. The situation called for action, and that is what Peter did at once. Events moved rapidly for Peter and John after the healing of the lame man. Large numbers of Jews crowded around Peter and asked him for an explanation. Peter did not hesitate to tell them all that had happened: the living Lord Jesus Christ whom they had crucified was alive in heaven; and He had performed his miracle through Peter. His witness, Peter's witness, was so effective that many Jews believed and joined the disciples.

This aroused and alarmed the temple authorities. They arrested Peter and John and charged them with disturbing the peace, by doing things they were not supposed to do. And in the course of what followed, you will remember, Peter and John were brought into court and were accused of this conduct on their part. Peter made that the occasion for witnessing again to the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the work of God in Christ. He told them about it in that incident. No matter how they questioned him, they were not able to say anything against it, because the lame man was standing right there and everybody knew him. The evidence was on hand, and so the testimony of Peter and John stood.

But the council in their judgment decided that they would have to put a stop to what was going on and so they brought Peter and John in and forbade them to do any more preaching in the name of Jesus Christ. And Peter told them they would have to judge for themselves whether a man should obey God or whether he should obey men. No matter what they said, no matter what they were going to do, he could not do anything else but what God in heaven gave him to do. If the Lord God led him to preach, he would preach; and if God led him to testify in the name of Jesus Christ that is what he would do.

As an actual matter of fact, that followed in just that way. The people in the council saw that Peter and John were uneducated, "unlearned and ignorant", and yet they were bold in their testimony. That word "ignorant" did not mean "stupid", that simply meant they were not educated people, they did not have college degrees, they had not been to seminary. Yet they were bold, standing before the council. They answered with boldness, even the members of the council took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. And I think not only that that meant that they had been with Him in the three years when they were among His disciples, but I think that possibly had reference to the fact that they had been with Him since

His resurrection.

They talked like folks who had firsthand knowledge. They talked like men that had eye witness evidence that this was actually the truth. That is the way in which Peter did. But when they went home from there, when Peter and John left the council, they had this hanging over them that if they would preach they would be beaten. They returned to their church, and the church had a prayer meeting. They went to God in prayer. That is how Peter was learning how to live in this world trusting in God and praying to Him for help.

Chapter 9

Peter Learns About Prayer (2)

In the book of Acts in chapter 4 we read about the Apostle Peter. When Peter and John had been brought into court, and had been ordered never to preach again on the pain of punishment, they had stoutly told the court that they could do only what God had asked them to do. They were warned if they did preach they would be punished. Now we read:

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, 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: who by the mouth of thy servant David has said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness (Acts 4:23-31).

As we study Peter we do well to keep in mind that we are looking at a typical disciple. Certainly he was a leader but he was actually one of the group.

Praying is an exercise all believers need to learn. Peter found out to his embarrassment that while the spirit indeed is willing, the flesh is always weak. Though this was the very night when Jesus would be arrested, and He would be ready to yield Himself to His Father's will, in the time of His own personal praying Peter fell asleep. Then again, at the time when the Lord meekly yielded to be arrested by the Roman soldiers, Peter wanted to resist by fighting, but was restrained by His Lord and instructed to yield that He might do His Father's will.

In the course of events Peter together with the other disciples witnessed the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, learned that He was really alive, and saw Him ascend into heaven. They had been instructed to wait for the promise of the Father. After spending ten days in prayer during which time they corrected what was lacking in selecting the twelfth apostle, the day of Pentecost was fully come and the Holy Spirit filled them all.

The next significant event was the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the temple. Here the faith of Peter and John was exercised immediately when they were confronted by the lame man. I am impressed by the fact that Peter did not at that moment take time out for prayer. The situation was immediate. Everything came together in a crisis that called for action. Peter could not have been more in faith, lying on his face in praying, than he was when he said to the lame man "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" (Acts 3:6-7). That is the way the scriptural record reads.

This was an exercise of faith on the part of Peter and John. Such faith was grounded in the presence of the Holy Spirit who had come upon the disciples after ten days of praying. The very nature of the event shows clearly that it was not Peter in himself that caused the lame man's healing. Peter was simply the channel through whom the Lord in heaven worked the miracle. This event caused such a sensation in Jerusalem that many of the Jews became believers and accepted Christ as Savior and Lord. This resulted in the arrest of Peter and John, and the subsequent ruling by the authorities forbidding them to preach in the name of Jesus. They were threatened with punishment by the authorities if they disobeyed. Peter stoutly announced "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20).

From that court session Peter and John went to their own company and told them of the threat that hung over them. And now the disciples did go to prayer. There was no immediate issue at stake. They were not being attacked by anybody. They had time. They took that time to pray. But such an occasion would arise, there would be trouble, and by way of preparation the disciples prayed. When the crisis occurred the punishment would come, and now as they looked forward to it they called on God in prayer for the grace that would enable them to obey God in face of this threatened punishment.

Faith to be obedient and to lay hold of God's strength in the face of threatened suffering would come in answer to prayer. Here I learn that it is possible that I will be confronted with situations demanding more strength than I have. In order to be able to meet such crises I need to pray for the grace that will enable me to be strong in my obedience to the glory of His name. Such was the case with Peter and the other disciples. And so we read:

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).

But this was not the end of the matter. We read again further:

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)

Then we read this startling record:

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).

By the way, I wonder if you have noticed Peter did not pray for this. There is no record that Peter had asked God for this kind of deliverance, which means to say that God can do more than we can ask or think. And while prayer is very, very vital to our service, very important so far as our living is concerned, you and I can have in mind that there will be occasions when the Lord will lead us into things that go beyond us, that we did not have any knowledge about. Peter did not pray about this and yet it happened. All this led up to the climax when the apostles were again admonished not to preach in the name of Jesus, and were beaten and released. And we read: "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" (Acts 5:41).

Some time later the persecution of the believers was undertaken by Herod the king and we read:

And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him (Acts 12:2, 3, 5).

Now at this point I am going to have to give you my own opinion. I give it to you very humbly and if I am wrong, I hope I will be forgiven and if you differ with me, you will not need to feel badly. I just want to make this comment. I have never felt that this praying that was done for Peter was to get him out of prison. I do not think the disciples were expecting Peter to be released. James had been killed and I do not think they would have felt that Peter was any better than James. Now Peter was taken and Herod intended to kill him. I think they were praying not that Peter would be taken out of prison, and not that Peter would escape, but that Peter would have strength: that Peter would be able to go through the whole experience to the glory of God. You will be called upon to serve God, you will be called upon to be faithful, you will be expected under God to do what He wants you to do. And for that you need grace, and you need strength, and you can pray for that. Now God can do more than you can ask or think. As it turned out Peter was miraculously delivered from prison but I am inclined to think that this was one of those things done over and beyond what was expected.

Here again we can see that the believers did nothing of themselves. They simply cast themselves

upon the truth of God as they were led by His indwelling Holy Spirit, and God did more for them than they could ask or think. Believers live and act in faith. But faith is nurtured and strengthened in praying. Believers face events as they develop. Such events are present issues that are over and beyond the ability of believers to endure and to handle, but God is always able to take part in the unfolding of the events to His glory. It is a wonderful thing in the studying of a man like Peter, and we walk as it were in his footsteps, and watch him as these things are happening, to think that this could happen to us in our own way, in our own situation. God will work in our hearts to do His will, and we will seek His face and we will ask His blessing. We will expect Him to do more for us than we can ask or think.

Chapter 10

Peter Learns To Follow (1)

We read in the Gospel of John the following words:

One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus (John 1:40-42).

Thus we see that Peter was brought by someone else into the company of those who looked upon Jesus of Nazareth as a Teacher of the Word of God. And that, by the way, is the way most of us come. If you stop to think about it, so far as you were concerned, the reason that you ever learned the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is because somebody told it to you. There was someone else who believed, who brought you. Oftentimes and normally this would be the case of parents with their children. They bring their children to the Sunday School or to the church. That is the way in which Andrew brought Peter to Jesus of Nazareth. Following John the Baptist, Jesus of Nazareth had preached "The Kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye and believe the Gospel."

It was the custom among the Jews that anyone could take the Scriptures in hand in the synagogue and expound their meaning. Before the public would accept such a teacher as authoritative they would look to see if he could perform any miracles or do some work of wonder. For instance when Nicodemus came to Jesus by night he could say "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2).

In the course of time such a teacher would have a company of listeners who followed him about as his disciples. And by the way I cannot help but take note in passing that appreciation of Jesus of Nazareth as a Teacher was not based upon what He said. It was not His talk at all. It was the consequences of His teaching, the results. The New Testament does not report much of what Jesus of Nazareth taught among the people of Galilee and Judea. We do have some report: for instance in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7. There we see that He took the Scriptures of the prophets and expounded them to show their real meaning. Scholars such as the "lawyers and scribes" and traditionalists such as the "Pharisees" accepted the Scriptures of the Old Testament as truly being the Word of God. In their interpretation of those Scriptures they had developed a system of rules and regulations which stressed outward conformity to the letter of the law, the Scriptures, according to their human understanding. At the same time there was a school of thought which denied the supernatural elements in the Scriptures and developed a system of interpretation which did not accept spiritual factors. These were called the "Sadducees."

Among these, Jesus of Nazareth was a notable exception. He told the Sadducees "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God." Then He said about the Pharisees and the scribes "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." The Scriptures record that after He preached the Sermon on the Mount, "It came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matthew 7:28-29). As a disciple this was the teaching that Peter heard. We do not know how long Peter was one of His disciples until he was given his commission as an apostle, but we do know that Peter had heard His teaching and had seen His miracles.

In the book of Matthew we read:

And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican: James the son of Alpheus, and Lebbeus, whose surname was Thaddeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent forth (Matthew 10:1-5).

As an apostle Peter was directed: "Preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:7-8).

It is astonishing to me to think that Peter was given this authoritative power when he had not yet learned everything, all that the Gospel implied. He had not yet seen the death, the burial, the resurrection or the ascension of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit had not yet been given. Yet Peter was given this authority and power. From this I learn that as servants of God we can have full power and authority even though we personally have yet much to learn. I feel like emphasizing to the mother or to the father whose guidance of their growing child may be questioned, he or she or they do not need to know everything to know enough to have authority.

When we read how Peter accepted the call of his Lord "And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not: from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him" (Luke 5:10-11), it could be easy to think that this was a simple almost thoughtless response. But later we read "Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore" (Matthew 19:27)? The reply of the Lord Jesus is valid for all the servants of Christ, as we read in Matthew:

And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life (Matthew 19:28-29).

No doubt Peter learned much from day to day as he served as an apostle, but all that he learned was brought to a climax on the occasion when the Lord met the disciples at the seashore as recorded in John chapter 21. First, Peter was confronted by a direct question, "Simon, son of Jona, lovest thou me more than these?" (John 21:15-17). This pointed question was asked three times. And Peter responded with his whole heart, "Lord . . . Thou knowest that I love thee." Each time the Lord commanded him, "Feed my lambs", and again "Feed my sheep", and the third time "Feed my sheep."

Then Peter was given special personal treatment. We read in John these words, the Lord speaking to Peter after Peter had told Him that he loved Him:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not. This spake he; signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me (John 21:18-19).

Now when you look at that you will see that the Lord told him "It is going to cost you, it will cost you everything that you are. You are going to have to give your life over to it." And then He said to Peter "Follow me."

"Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved (and we all understand that to be John) following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me" (John 21:20-22). This direct, almost blunt answer is our guidance as a whole. We cannot decide our course of action by looking at other people. It is not what the other man is doing, but what the Lord wants me to do. Here Peter is warned that following Christ in his case, in Peter's case, will mean personal suffering. And when Peter would have asked about John, "What shall this man do?" he was told very plainly, so much so that we can almost feel bluntly, that that was none of his business. Think of it. The important thing for Peter to hear was "Follow thou me." The call becomes very, very personal. So Peter learned that so far as he was concerned, he was to follow the Lord regardless of what anybody else did, or anything that might happen to him, he was to follow the Lord.

Chapter 11

Peter Learns to Follow (2)

"But Peter followed him afar off . . ." These are the words that we find in Matthew 26:58. It is a common practice to think of all believers in Christ as being saved. We speak of them as being born again. The world calls them Christians. It is a common error to expect them all to be alike. When we hear of some believer who has shown strong spiritual qualities we are disposed to expect such spiritual strength from all believers. When we hear of some professed believer being involved in gross sin all believers flinch because the man called himself a Christian. And they feel now that involved them. All such mistaken references are based upon a false premise: we assume all believers are alike. This is simply not true. Nor is it true that any believer is at the same level spiritually in his own experience at all times.

Faith does not operate at all times at the same level. All believers have two natures in their personalities. The carnal nature is grounded in the flesh. Every believer has his flesh as long as he is in this world. The spiritual nature is grounded in the Word of God, as he believes it and obeys it. The profound truth is that the believer's obedience to the Word is not constant, not always at the same level. As he confronts any issue the believer is prompted to act as a human being in his flesh and also to act as a child of God in his spirit.

All this can be seen in the case of Peter as the record shows. Peter evidently was an earnest man who had committed himself to walk with Jesus of Nazareth. We do not question his loyalty even though we may see weaknesses in his conduct. The Scripture we read points directly to an instance where Peter was not wise. Peter was committed to follow the Lord. When the Roman soldiers arrested Jesus of Nazareth, Peter rushed to his Master's defense with an open sword. There is no evidence of any lack of courage, nor any breach of loyalty at that time.

When the soldiers led Jesus of Nazareth away, Peter followed, but he "followed Him afar off." We are given no specific explanation. The natural circumstances would be sufficient reason for such conduct. Despite his following afar off, it should be noted that he followed. But a profound truth comes to light when we note what happened after this. Confronted by questions from bystanders, Peter denied his Lord. It was all so very natural, even as it was very sad.

"Following afar off " accounted for Peter remaining in the courtyard where the soldiers had built a fire because of the cold. Peter drew near the fire to warm himself. When he was questioned about his relation to Jesus of Nazareth he denied that he ever knew Him. This was an action that Peter certainly did not want to do, and yet he did it.

We know with appreciation both the fact that Peter "went out and wept bitterly", and also that the risen Lord specifically named Peter as one who should come to Galilee where he would see the Lord. But just now we want to face this question: How could he do it? How could this strong, bold man be so cowed in the presence of a girl asking him about his relation to his Lord?

We remember how Jesus of Nazareth warned His disciples that when He was smitten they would all forsake Him, and how Peter stoutly maintained that even if all forsook Him, he, Peter, would remain constant. He would not forsake his Lord though he faced death. It was then that the Lord told Peter: "Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice" (Matthew 26:34). And so it happened. But how could it? We have the uneasy feeling that in this we have an illustration of how it often happens with us. The underlying fact in all this is that constant faithfulness to the Lord is not a function of our human nature. We are not humanly equipped to be always faithful to the Lord. Such consistency requires the grace of God in the heart. This will be given to me as I commune with the Lord in worshipping Him. It is a function of the Holy Spirit who activates the will of the living Lord in the believer. Such steady faith is the result of "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

We can better understand Peter's denial when we remember this happened before Pentecost. The Holy

Spirit had not yet been given. Peter was following the Lord Jesus as He was being taken away to appear before the Jewish council, but he was following Him as a human being. Since he was following afar off, the influence of the presence of the Lord would not be so great. Peter's own human nature was very sensitive to the situation when he was accused in the presence of the soldiers of being a follower of Jesus of Nazareth. It seems proper to think that if he had followed more closely he would have had a more vivid awareness of his Lord. In any case this happened before Pentecost.

It is refreshing to remember that this same Peter was the man who only a few weeks later appeared in court and boldly witnessed in the name of Jesus Christ. When he was warned not to preach or to teach in His name, Peter boldly challenged the court as to whether they would forbid him to obey God. And when it happened that they did beat him because he continued to witness in the name of Jesus Christ, it is recorded in Scripture of Peter and John: "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" (Acts 5:41).

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit was given into the hearts of the believers. The Holy Spirit would activate in the believers the will of their Lord. There is no further record that Peter ever shrank in public from proclaiming the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so our hearts have been stirred as we think about this man, so earnest, so sincere, so dedicated to following the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet he stumbled in this simple fashion in such an embarrassing way. No wonder that he went out and wept bitterly.

But this same Peter, as I have just pointed out to you, is the very one who, when they threatened him with official condemnation and official beating if he ventured to preach further in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, came back to the group of believers and they prayed that these disciples might have the strength, that they might have the courage, to openly confess the Lord. And they did. They accepted the punishment and rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

Peter is referred to again and again in the book of Acts after this in which he takes a prominent part in everything that is being done. And the time came when Peter himself was to be martyred. We do not have this in Scripture but tradition tells us that Peter was put to death by the Romans for his witnessing for Christ. He was put to death in the usual custom of being crucified. Tradition says that Peter asked them when he was being crucified that they would crucify him head down because he was not worthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord, because one time he denied Him. That is what tradition has to say. And it helps you to see how throughout all history the name of Peter has been greatly honored and revered among believing people and yet there was a time when he could deny his Lord. But that was just after he had followed Him afar off.

Chapter 12

Peter And Faith

"Have faith in God." This exhortation was given to Peter when he noticed the withering of the fig tree after Jesus of Nazareth had cursed it. We read in Mark:

And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses (Mark 11:20-26).

It is interesting as we read that when Peter told the Lord that the fig tree was withering away, Jesus answering said unto them, unto all the apostles, "Have faith in God." This incident occurred toward the end of the early ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Peter had been with the Lord for about three years as a disciple. He had had many opportunities to learn about faith and a few of these are recorded for us. In Luke chapter 5 we read of an incident of this nature:

And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake (Luke 5:3-6).

This is perhaps the first incident in which Peter learned about obeying in faith. When the Lord Jesus told him to launch out into the deep and let down his nets for a draught of fish, Peter's reaction was that of a fisherman. That was Peter's life work, so that he was an expert in that field naturally. He said to the Lord, "There are not any fish out there. We toiled all night and have taken nothing." It is like saying that the fish are not running. And then we read this: "Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." You have Peter's reaction as a fisherman, it would be no use to go; but then you have his reaction as a believer, I will go if you say so. This is what he did and of course we all know the results. He took so many fish they could not bring them in.

The effect on Peter was that when Peter came ashore he fell at Jesus' feet and said to Him "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." What could give Peter that feeling? Would it not be that he just realized that he had actually doubted? This is an interesting aspect of the whole matter of living by faith, walking by faith, and acting and doing things by faith. Faith is not based upon what you expect as a natural consequence of what you are doing. Peter did not expect to catch any fish because I think he, as a fisherman, knew that there were no prospects of catching fish. That is why they had come to shore and were drying their nets. They were through. But as a believer he would do something that apparently from a human point of view did not make sense.

Now in Luke chapter 10 we have another incident. The seventy had been sent out to tell the people that the Lord Jesus was coming and that He would be doing miracles among them.

And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you: but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven (Luke 10:17-20).

Peter had learned much in the time that he was with the Lord and when he had been sent out with those seventy he had seen consequences of what would happen when they simply did what the Lord asked them to do.

Then we look again in Matthew 19. This occurred later on in Peter's life and experience. But here we read:

Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore (Matthew 19:27)?

This would be the very normal question a person would ask who has obeyed the Lord. We noticed when Peter obeyed the Lord he caught a great many fish. Now Peter had left his fishing occupation and came and followed the Lord. That was all that he was doing. He now asks the question, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?"

And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first (Matthew 19:28-30).

He was not rebuked for asking that question: "What do we get now that we have forsaken everything to follow thee?" That is a proper question. If anyone of us should actually reach that point spiritually, that we are conscious of the fact that we have determined to follow the Lord in spite of anything and everything, regardless of what it costs us, regardless of what we lose, it is a proper thing for us to ask, "What difference will that make? What do I get out of that?" That would be a proper question. And the Lord Jesus will answer us "You will get plenty, you will get the blessing of God."

One more time I want to turn back in Mark chapter 11.

And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God . . . What things soever ye desire, when ye pray believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them (Mark 11:20-24).

And then the Lord goes on to add this word. Isn't it strange that in connection with that, right here the Lord says "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (verse 25). Because the one thing that would hinder our receiving blessing from God is our sin and our trespasses against God, and those things are actual facts. What we have done that way is a real thing. It is entered into the record. And we are standing in the presence of God and that would bar us from the blessing of God. But God will forgive.

But now we have an interesting aspect and we should not miss this. As God forgives us we should forgive others. "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Mark 11:25-26). That is the way it is and these are some of the things that Peter learned in this whole matter of faith.

Chapter 13

Peter And Self-Confidence

But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all (Mark 14:31).

In this chapter we are going to be studying an aspect of Peter's experience that is common to us all.

And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives. And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered. But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee. But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I. And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all (Mark 14:26-31).

The Lord Jesus was preparing His disciples for what was going to happen. He knew what was going to happen but they could have no idea. This One who had been with them for several years as their Teacher and Leader, and who had done remarkable things, who had been able to display miraculous powers, was going to be taken and put to death. It would be hard for them to accept such a thing. Jesus of Nazareth was preparing them for it and telling them that when He was smitten, they would all be scattered. We are interested in Peter's reaction, which was a normal reaction and natural. It was common. Do not forget the phrase that says "Likewise also said they all." All the disciples took the same position. They were not going to deny Him; but they all did.

This is one of our basic perils in the way in which we live our own spiritual life. Unconsciously, naturally, we take it on ourselves. I suppose it is just so common to us that we hardly are aware of it. When we think of the Lord and we think about our relationship to the Lord, it comes into us "I am going to do something. I am going to do something for Him. I am going to stand up for Him." This is a very natural, very normal kind of thing. It happened that way long ago.

In Old Testament times when Moses gave the Law of God to the people of Israel and he had outlined it before them, they said "We will do it. This is what we will do." Of course we know they failed. But that is the common tendency. When you do believe in God and you are reminded to honor Him, when you understand what He wants you to do, you have the feeling "It is up to me. I am going to have to do it."

In New Testament times, even after the Lord was here, during the time of the New Testament church we find that so far as the Jews were concerned this was the very way in which they did it. In Romans chapter 10 we find the Apostle Paul has these words to say:

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God (Romans 10:1-3).

The phrase in there that I want to draw your attention to is: "going about to establish their own righteousness", that is our snare. This is the tendency we have. "I am going to do the right thing. I will never do the wrong thing. I will never deny the Lord. I am certainly going to stand up for Him." This is what Peter thought.

The same incident is reported in Luke chapter 22:

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both in prison, and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me (Luke 22:31-34).

Peter could not believe it. He was so sure he was not going to do it. "Satan hath desired to have you."

This is a very real peril. You know when you and I think about the Lord and we think about our relationship to the Lord, we are so inclined to think that there is just the two of us, myself and the Lord. That is not the whole story. I never stand before the Lord, as it were, alone. In the offing always Satan is on hand, so to speak. He makes himself ready. "Satan hath desired to have you." Does it occur to you that Satan has actually got his eye on you, and that he knows your weaknesses? He does not know everything. But he knows where your leaning side is. He knows where your weakness is, and he will set the situation up in such a way as to tempt you at that point. You will not be conscious of being tempted. You will just act naturally. It is a very real peril. We are so often unaware of what is actually happening and part of the reason for that is that we completely overlook the fact that Satan is real and Satan is active and he is just waiting for a situation in which he will tempt us to serve ourselves without being aware of it. We will take it on ourselves to do this thing, and we are sure to be defeated.

That is the way it was with Peter. He was so sure that he would not deny his Lord, and you and I know that he did. But the point is that if there had been any spot in there that was wrong, it was that he trusted in himself. This is something that we need to learn. It is something that needs to come out to us clearly. It is when we put our trust in the Lord. It is when we admit "I might not be able to stand up, I might be easily tricked into falling, I might easily go the wrong way, but the Lord could keep me." If we put our hands into the hand of the Lord and trust everything over to Him, if we are humbly willing to confess our shortcomings, and to repent of every instance when we fail Him, if we have in mind that we do not trust ourselves, we trust Him, we yield to Him. It is Christ in you, the hope of glory. And so just have in mind with reference to walking with the Lord, we may make up our minds to it in the sense this is what we want to do, but as surely as we do, we are tempted to think we are going to do it. And what I am emphasizing and dwelling upon here is that this is the danger. This is dangerous. When I trust myself that I am going to do it, I am leading myself right into the spot where I am liable to fail. Satan knows this. Do not ever forget Satan is very real, "he goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour."

I expect I should stop and just ask again, when these thoughts come to you, are you aware of the fact that Satan is alive and malicious? He has his eye on you and he is going to try and trick you into doing the very thing you do not want to do. You can deny the Lord in so many different ways, and Satan will trick you into doing it. At the time that you do it you will feel so natural. You will feel that you are doing just exactly what ought to be done. It is up to you. So you are going to try to do this thing right. You are going to depend on your getting it done. No, no, no. You cannot. Trust the Lord. Humbly throw yourself on the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ. When you falter and when you fail, admit it, and come back to Him. He will sustain you. He will keep you and He will see you through. This is what you and I need to learn over and over again. Just have that in mind that when Peter said, "I will not deny thee in any wise, if I should die with thee, I will not deny thee," yet he did. "Likewise also said they all." They all had that in mind and yet they all did forsake Him.

Chapter 14

Peter And Denial of His Lord

In this chapter we are going to study the most distressing experience that Peter ever had. I have no doubt that Peter has been blamed in this incident far more than he has actually deserved. What happened to Peter could happen to any believer, and often does. There are three different accounts of this particular incident. Let me bring the first one to your attention.

And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest: and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire. And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none. For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together. And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying, We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together. And the high priest stood up in their midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against thee? But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death. And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophecy: and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands. And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest: and when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew. And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them. And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto. But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak. And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crew twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept (Mark 14:54- 72).

That is the story. Now when you are thinking about all this, you should keep in mind something of what I might call the floor plan of the temple. Let me remind you that when you are speaking about the temple, it is a number of buildings, not just one building. There was an inner room and that would be where the court was being held and then there would be hallways and porches. Peter had stopped on the outside. And when you speak of him being in the courtyard, that is like the open yard surrounded by a wall. This is where the Jewish people held their meetings.

The situation was that the soldiers had built a fire, and Peter stood by that fire and warmed himself. That was the whole story. We read that Peter sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire. This was a very normal thing. Then "one of the maids of the high priest: when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth." He denied it. He went out into the porch, that is like going out from one section of these buildings to another, and when he was out there the cock crew. A maid saw him again and spoke to him and he denied it again. Finally one of them said "Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto." And this is how it happened, very naturally.

By the way, when you notice that matter of his speech betraying him, you can keep in mind a very common thing: when we are doing something we ought not to be doing, when we are in a situation we ought not to be in, it is such a natural thing in our nervousness that we talk too much. We talk and talk. Peter was evidently talking to make himself seem one of them so that he could, as it were, disguise himself. That is how it happened.

Now let us look to the Gospel according to Luke and see how it was reported there.

Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. And he

denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilean. And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter (Luke 22:54-61).

The Lord would be in the inner room, doors open where court was being held. At this point, the Lord turned and looked out at Peter who was standing out in the hallway.

And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly (Luke 22:61-62).

That is the way in which it goes. The only thing we have in there that is an additional thought is that it was about one hour after. In other words after he had denied twice because two different persons seeing him said "This is one of them" and he said "No, I do not know the man" and so on. And in the space of one hour afterwards someone spoke up and said "This man is a Galilean, his speech betrayeth him." And I suppose we all have in mind what that means, that there was a certain Galilean accent. You know in different parts of the country people have different characteristic ways of speaking. They speak with a certain twang or they speak with a certain drawl. We speak of a southern accent, and we speak of a Texas accent. Here the people came up and said "This is a Galilean." And when Peter thought on it he went out and wept bitterly.

Now there is one more report and that is in John.

Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man's disciples? He saith, I am not. And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself. The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine. Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said. And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me? Now Annas had sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest. And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of his disciples? He denied it, and said, I am not. One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him? Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew (John 18:17-27).

That is the way the story goes. And when we are thinking of all that over and over again we could ask ourselves how was it possible, how was it possible for Peter, who was so bold, to do that? When they came to arrest the Lord Jesus, Peter drew his sword and attacked, as it were, the whole Roman army single handed. There was no doubt about his courage, and yet here he denies his Lord three times. But as you look into the report you will find they took him off guard. They came to him at a time when he was trying to escape notice, and wanted to be one of them. And so in order to be one of them, he had to deny the Lord. And we can all learn from this. Oh, how easily it happens that we want to be one of them. We do not want to be specially noticed. We do not want to bear the brunt of being different. And so we fit in, and in so fitting in we deny our Lord. This is how it happened with Peter.

Chapter 15

Peter And His Interceding Lord

In our last study we saw how Peter found out how unreliable he was in himself. He had been so confident that he would not deny his Lord, yet he had done so. In this chapter we will note by way of contrast the faithfulness of the Lord. This is a demonstration of "Before they call, I will answer."

As the time was approaching when the earthly career of Jesus of Nazareth was coming to a close, and the Lord was preparing His disciples to face the fact that He would be gone and they would be alone in this world, we read:

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren (Luke 22:31-23).

This is one of the precious passages of Scripture. Oh! how we can turn back here and look at this, and wonder and marvel and worship and praise. The Lord warned Simon, "You are going to be in trouble, but I am going to take care of you." But He pointed out even more. "You will be in trouble because of Satan. Satan has desired to have you. He has obtained you by request. He asked for the privilege of testing you, 'that he may sift you as wheat.'" Notice how these words unfold. "Simon, Simon," this was his natural name. You remember how the Lord Jesus told him when He saw him when He met him first, "Men call thee Simon, but thou shalt be called Peter." We have drawn your attention on other occasions to the fact that "Simon" suggests sand, but that "Peter" means a rock. You know the significance of sand in the New Testament is that it will not stay firm. You cannot build on sand. A house that is built on sand will crumble. But the rock will stand. Here He calls him "Simon, Simon" which is "Simon, your natural human state, as you are naturally. Satan hath desired to have you, he has obtained you by request."

And you may wonder about that. How can that happen? In the book of Job you will read how Satan came before God and intimated that no one would obey God. God drew Job to the forefront. Job was a righteous man. "Look at that man." And Satan had said, "Let me have him, give him to me and let me test him, and I will show you that he will give in. He will not stand faithful." And that is the whole background of what happened in the book of Job. And you know in this case, Job did not know that Satan had done all this. Job went through the experience that he went through and had no way of understanding that this was part of a great spiritual conflict in the heavenlies. All he heard was that the wind destroyed his buildings, and the bandits robbed him of his cattle and his holdings, that calamity had destroyed the children. That is all that Job knew. He did not know that back of it all was Satan.

We may not know what danger we are in because of the enemy that we have. It may seem to us that we are not that important. It may seem to us that nobody would bother much about trying to undo us. But we happen to be trophies of the Lord Jesus Christ. We contribute to His glory. It is to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ that He would save the likes of us. So what Satan goes about seeking to do, is to tempt us into unfaithfulness, to tempt us into disobedience, showing that the salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ was not real.

The Lord said "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat." Now the sifting of the grain is putting it through a process which would separate the chaff from the wheat. By putting the wheat in a sieve and then shaking the sieve where wind is blowing, the chaff will flyaway and the wheat will be left. That is the process. Satan wanted to take Peter, shake him up and show how unreliable he was and how disobedient he would be and then in so doing it would be obvious that there was not any real wheat in Peter, that he was just chaff. But now we read: "But I have prayed for thee." What a marvelous statement! I think one should at that point just stop and say "Hallelujah, praise the Lord!"

Just think of having the Lord Jesus Christ on our side and that He has prayed for us about that which is going to happen. Right now while we are thinking on these things, anyone of us has a day coming up.

We have tomorrow, we trust. We are moving into the future. And how easy it is for us to assume that everything will be fine. We have had some troubles today and we had some troubles yesterday but we have them under control and everything is going to be fine, without knowing that Satan is actually aiming, scheming to trap us tomorrow in some way. "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not."

If the Lord Jesus is going to pray for us, I think I could, as a human being, wonder why He did not pray that I would be spared the temptation? Why did He not pray that I would be kept from trouble? Why should He not pray that I would not have to go through the deep waters. He did not pray that. What He prayed was that when the trouble came my faith would not fail, that when the disaster would come, and I would be in danger of losing everything, that I would not give up. That my faith would be firm. "That thy faith fail not." Again keep this in mind, not that you would be spared the testing: the trouble will come, the disaster will occur; but that you may endure. That is the important thing. It is not that we would find ourselves kept out of the deep waters but that He will be with us through the deep waters.

And when He had said this, then He said, "When thou art converted." This will bring to our minds the fact that the word "converted" is used in various ways and we have today made it mean something in spiritual experience about accepting the Lord. We talk about a man being converted because he turned to the Lord Jesus Christ. And the turning part is part of the conversion, of course. The word "convert," just like it sounds, means to be turned around. And so far as Peter is concerned, he was being told "When thou art converted", when your experience in spiritual experience and dependence upon the Lord has resulted in you being turned around, instead of your being a person who would be willing to doubt and ready to doubt, you are going to become a person who will be sure that the Lord is with him. "And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

The blessings that we receive spiritually, the blessings that come to us because God is with us, are intended to fit us to help other people. We are comforted of God in order that we may be able to comfort them that are in any trouble. That is the way Paul told it to the Corinthians in his second epistle:

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God (II Corinthians 1:3-4).

"Strengthen thy brethren." So far as you and I are concerned, if we have reason that God has been good to us and faithful to us and he has kept us, we should help other people.

This very day I received a long distance phone call in which one of the people that has been blessed by my ministry over the radio called to ask for prayer. And when I asked this particular person, "Well, what is it that you need?" she said, "It is the usual thing." And I knew very well what the usual thing was. She has a haunting fear that she has done wrong, a feeling that the wrong she has done is unforgivable. It is hard for her to believe that the Lord Jesus will stay with her and yet when I said to her, "Well, if it is the same problem you had before, then you know the answer. Because you are asking me, you know what I will say. The answer is the same answer you have always had. You turn to the Lord and you will find out He will not forsake you." And her difficulty was, of course, that she thought she would forsake Him.

"Strengthen thy brethren." Share your victory. God has been good to you, tell it, let people know. If you have had any blessing, if you have had an experience in which God has been faithful to you, share it with other people. When God has blessed tell others, because the more we hear about it, the easier it is to believe it, and the stronger our faith will be.

Chapter 16

Peter And Foot-Washing

Much of the truth that is revealed by Jesus of Nazareth He demonstrated in His own personal conduct, but there was a very important aspect of His instruction that He could not personally demonstrate. One of the very important aspects of godliness is love between brethren. "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12). This He could not demonstrate. They needed to do that between themselves. But He could set them an example and this is what He did.

Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; he riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know yet what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them (John 13:1-17).

This is the way the record reads. In this account we can learn more about Peter. We hear him saying, "Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" "You mean to say you are going to take the place of a servant and treat me as if I were an honored guest?" That was the custom of the day. Peter was shocked to think that the Lord would do this. Then Peter said "Thou shalt never wash my feet." In other words Peter was not going to let the Lord take that humble position of washing feet because that was the position of a servant. That would make something more out of Peter than he felt that he was. Peter indicated that he just would not put up with it. And then the Lord told him "If I do not wash your feet, you cannot have any part with me." And when Peter heard that, Peter said, "Well not my feet only, but my hands and my head."

The meaning of the Lord's answer can be seen in the literal translation of His words: "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all" (verse 10). Now there are two different words in the Greek used for wash and brought over into English. You could say "He that is bathed needeth not save to rinse his feet." Now you will remember in those days individual homes did not have bath tubs. People did not take their baths at home. There was a public bathhouse. The result would be as they would walk through the dusty road home, the feet would get dusty. What the Lord is saying here is "He that is bathed" the person who has been to the bathhouse and has been completely bathed head to foot, "is clean every whit: head to foot." But walking home the feet would get dusty, he would not need to bathe them but to rinse them. Now that is the importance of these Greek words. He that is bathed needeth not save to rinse his feet and he is clean every whit. This is what He said to Peter.

And that can have a deeper meaning for us. There is a sense in which everyone of us who are believers have been washed in the blood of the Lamb and all sin has been taken away and we are actually presented before God clean and spotless in the sight of God because Christ Jesus has taken away our sins. And in that sense we have been bathed. But as we live in this world, day in and day out, we are walking barefoot on a dusty road and day by day we need to rinse our feet. We do things that we ought not to do, we leave undone things that we should have done. Our record is not perfect, but it is not profoundly wrong. We do not mean to do anything against Christ. We really do worship Him. And we really do want to follow Him.

God knows our heart and so the fact of the matter is, as far as we have in our ordinary living experience, we rejoice in the fact that Christ Jesus carried away our sins. We rejoice in the fact that the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin. But we acknowledge the fact that day in and day out we do not always do what we ought to do. And that is walking in this world, the way in which it goes in this world. That is like walking home from the bathhouse, that this actually will happen.

And this is the deeper meaning that can be for everyone of us. And it leads us exactly to the significance of this whole truth that we are looking at. So far as believers are concerned in their ministry to each other, it is not that they can reconcile us to God. Other believers who may live in my home or live in my neighborhood or be a member of my church and who can help me in my own life and my own way of doing things and keep me close to the Lord by their own fellowship with me, cannot reconcile me to God. That has been done by the death of Christ on the cross. But so far as my daily life is concerned, I need to remember John says that if any man sin, if he confesses his sin, God is faithful to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Then the Lord went on to say "For I have given you an example." I am your Lord and Master. You say I am and you are telling the truth, that is what I am. "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet." This is a way of saying that if I see my brother, if I see my fellow Christian, doing things he ought not to do or leaving undone things that he ought to do, I need to help him. One of the first things I need to do for him is to pray for him, because this is what the Lord would want me to do so far as this other person is concerned. "I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you." "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet" which is to say that we should be interested in our fellow believers.

In other words so far as we believers are concerned, there is no freedom in Scripture and in the Lord to spend our time criticizing each other and finding fault with each other. The fault may be there and the fault may be real, in which case we ought to take steps removing it. And one of the first things we will do is to pray for it. This is what Peter had to learn from the example that the Lord Jesus showed him of how he was to do with other people. We can all take this to heart.

So far as you are concerned, with reference to the other people who are believers that you know, especially those in your own home that you live with, they may not be perfect, they may not do everything that they should, but if you see any fault or any blemish or any shortcoming, you hurry up to remove that, help them out of it. I am not sure that you need to openly condemn them. I am not sure that you need to approach them with any indictment of any sort, but I think you ought to pray for them, you ought to be concerned about them and help them away from that so that they will not fall into that same sin again the second time. That kind of thing. And we can give the Lord thanks and praise for having shown us how to do this.

Chapter 17

Peter And Violence

In the course of living a believer is sometimes beset by violence. Since God is almighty and God is good and God cares about His own, how is a believer to understand this? Here we can learn something very important from Peter. Peter's reaction to the threat of violence is very natural, resist it with violence, in self defense, of course.

And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they and laid hands on Jesus, and took him. And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be (Matthew 26:50-54)?

The reaction of Peter was so very natural. When they by force took the Lord, he by force would defend the Lord and then the Lord Jesus said to him "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" If the Lord had wanted to resist the Roman soldiers, it would have been very simple. The believer is to meekly accept the violence, although he knows that God could deliver him. The Lord went on to say "But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" In the overall plan of God His Son was to suffer unto death that He might rise from the dead to the glory of God, hence there was no resistance to the forces of violence. Yielding to violence is the way to victory in the Lord.

Now this is something that is not easy for us to understand. I think many times we underestimate the significance of our own personal testimony for the Lord. It is hard for us to keep in mind that if anyone is going to live obediently to the Lord, which means that, in the case of the threat of violence, he is actually going to yield to the situation and resist not evil. It is hard for anyone to have in mind that that is exactly what he should do and in that way God will bless him.

Here is another report of the same incident.

Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it (John 18:10-11)?

This brings to our minds this very true and important fact, something that is not easy to grasp. The matter of the experience of violence, something being done against you, actually is in the will of the Father. The Lord Jesus had faced all this in Gethsemane when He sweat, as it were, great drops of blood, yielding Himself into the will of His Father. Now you remember how He prayed in Gethsemane, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me that I drink it not." Then He prayed His prayer "Nevertheless not my will but thine be done." He came out from there in quietness and peace knowing that He was going to suffer violence and knowing that they were going to put Him to death, but knowing too that this was in the will of His Father and this was the Father's way of leading Him into the fullness of eternal life.

"Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear." That is violence. "The servant's name was Malchus." This was Peter's natural response, resist it, fight fire with fire. They are going to do it to me, so I am going to do it to them. "Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Now it may be that the cup that the Father has given is that you are actually going to suffer something because you happen to be a believer. I think this comes out in ways that it is not easy for us always to remember. If a person is working in an office and maintains a believer's testimony, you can be absolutely sure there will come circumstances and instances and situations in which you will be misrepresented, you will be

hurt, you will be unfairly treated, you will be falsely accused, these things are going to happen. Now you may defend yourself on occasion from a false accusation but on the whole so far as that is concerned, the thing that you and I can learn here is that such experiences are not out of place. When any of these things happen we are to accept them as being part of the sufferings of Christ.

Now I need to go over that again. If in your home anyone of you is going to live and act and do according to the will of God, you can expect that there will be others in the family, maybe not in your immediate household but among your relatives and friends, there will be others in your company who are going to mistreat you when they get a chance and they are going to do it with satisfaction. They feel almost as if they are getting even with you. What in the world did you do? All you did was act as if the Lord was real. You acted as if there really was a God and you tried to do the right thing in the sight of God. Do you realize that when you tried to do the right thing in the sight of God you made them look bad? You made them look at fault? Now they are going to get even with you. And their way of getting even with you is to falsely accuse you, to criticize you. They will talk about you behind your back. There is no possible way that you can escape the unhappy experience of being mistreated. That will come to you. It came to the Lord Jesus Christ and the servant is not greater than his Master.

It is so common for us to fight fire with fire, to stand up for ourselves, to resist; but the word is no, no, no. If you are the one that is involved, yield. "Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" This is not easy to understand. I would like to share this with you in a sympathetic way. This will happen to you in your office, it will happen to you in your home, it will happen to you in your school. If you are known in the faculty as the one person who goes to prayer meeting, that you exercise prayer, and they know about that, they will hold it against you. They will find fault in any way they possibly can and in so doing they are simply extending to you the very persecution that Jesus Christ suffered when He went to the cross.

Jesus of Nazareth considered that His heavenly Father ordered all His experiences. He had feared the possibility of such violence, even to His own death, in Gethsemane He had faced it and He has gained the victory – "Not my will but thine be done." Now the violence was emerging which would kill Him and He was ready to endure it to the end. So for the believer we remember this passage in Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount:

But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also (Matthew 5:39).

There is no way of explaining that away. Do not try it. Simply look at it and ask the Lord to give you grace: grace in your own heart that so far as you are concerned when you are being mistreated, you are being misjudged, you are being given a hard time and the only reason in sight is you happen to be a believer and others are not, when that happens you just need to think you are fulfilling the sufferings of Christ.

Chapter 18

Peter And Going Fishing

I want to study with you the record of an incident in which I feel that Peter has often been unfairly represented. This is the account recorded in the book of John.

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias: and on this wise showed he himself. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes. As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, a hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead (John 21:1-14).

This is the story. It seems to me that I usually hear this quoted as an indication that Peter had somehow lost faith and now was going to resume his life in the natural way that he had followed before he met the Lord. I feel the truth here is quite different and needs to be noted, because we have something to learn.

There are mountain-top experiences in a person's life, periods when spiritual things are prominently, easily seen, but such times do not always persist. Life had these unusual moments, as "the Upper Room", but then life settles back into a more normal and more usual mode.

Peter was a fisherman by trade. This is how he made his living. After he had been specially blessed in personal fellowship with his Lord, Peter went back to his own way of working for his daily bread. A major reason I do not think that this implies any blemish in Peter's faith is that the Lord came to him while he was fishing and revealed Himself to Peter in a new way. "Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus." He may come to us at any time as we do our usual tasks. And it would not be a bit surprising if He would come to us and we would not recognize Him. We would not be aware of the fact that we were dealing with the Lord. "They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes." He can bring us into daily blessing in our regular work. We need to keep in mind that it is not necessary for us to go to some foreign land as a missionary in order to walk with the Lord. We do not have to become a nationally known evangelist in order to serve the Lord. We need to have in mind that we can actually walk with the Lord in our usual tasks, in our usual things. This is so important here because Peter went back to what his profession was, what his trade was. He can bring us into blessing in our regular work.

I wonder – do we thank Him when all goes well with us? We go into a situation where we do not know what the future is, we do not know what tomorrow will bring, and it turns out well. Do we thank God? Do we really feel in our heart that God was blessing us? Are we conscious of the fact that because things worked as well as they did in spite of everything, we really should be thanking the Lord who helped us about that? Because this is what He would do. And so we come to the place where the Lord Jesus said to them, "Come and dine." I cannot help but feel that this is not the way a disbelieving, disobedient soul is treated. If Peter had been actually involved in a matter of having lost his faith and turning away from the Lord, I do not believe that he would then find the Lord preparing a meal for him. So Peter, in resuming his own regular normal routine, sees the Lord. Can you have in mind, so far as you are concerned, that when

you go about your usual task, the thing that you are supposed to do, are you able to feel the hand of the Lord upon you? Can you recognize that The Lord would deal with those things that you are dealing with? The sweeping of the floor, the washing of the dishes, the ironing of the clothes, the hanging up of the drapes, that those things are actually the kind of thing that you could ask Him for help in handling and that He would help you in that? This is what you can find in this.

Peter had been one of the apostles and he had been with the Lord on some great, wonderful occasions. He had seen miracles performed, but you are to understand that life is not made up only of a set of miracles. There may be miracles in your life and God may do a wonderful thing for you, but you do not have to wait for Him to do something extraordinary. He can actually be with you while you are doing the ordinary everyday things that are before you. I feel that I cannot stress this too much. When Peter said that he was going fishing, when he said that he was going to do that, remember he was just saying in effect, "I am going to take up my usual routine. I am going to be doing what I ordinarily do." Now listen one more time and let me go over it very slowly so that you will not miss it. "Then the Lord came to him." Did you get that? When he was doing the very thing he was supposed to be doing, that he was doing for his own living, then the Lord came to him and showed Himself unto him. I think this is marvelous. I think this is absolutely tremendous.

The Lord actually prepared things for him in his ordinary routine. In the ordinary everyday hum-drum experience of life the Lord had His hand in that, and when He had arranged everything He said to Peter, "Come and dine." You come and eat here. I have prepared it for you. So again let me urge you with reference to your ordinary everyday task, whatever it may be, if you are driving a truck, or you work in an office, or you teach school, or you are a housewife, whatever it may be, in the ordinary routine of your daily tasks, right then and right there if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you are actually seeking to walk with Him and you have asked Him to be with you, you can expect Him to be there.

And by the way, the Lord can be there when you do not even recognize Him. You are to call upon yourself in spirit to realize that this could be true, that you can actually find Him there, and He will show Himself to you. He will call on you to come and share with Him, "Come and dine." Things that He had prepared for you will be found right there where you live, right in that situation. So when you are going about your daily work, leave it open to the idea that the Lord can have a hand in it and that He will work in it and he will bring things to pass in a way that will glorify His name and that will draw you unto Him, and make you more and more of a believer in Him. Do not ever overlook this. So far as Peter is concerned, do not think that he was anything exceptional in this regard. He was a type. He was typical of all the believers, of all the disciples because when he said that he was going to go fishing, which was returning to his regular task, the others said they would go, too. They would return to their regular tasks.

You may have a wonderful experience in church. You may have a wonderful experience in some special services, you may actually draw nigh to the Lord when you have some prayer meeting experience; and then you go back to your regular everyday activity. You need not feel that you necessarily have to expect a let down. Just have in mind that the Lord is able to be with you there, and He will be with you when you return to your regular tasks. He will actually manipulate those in such a way that you can find things happening for good. Thank Him. Be sure to thank Him because in that way your fellowship with Him will grow.

Chapter 19

Peter And His Lord

In this chapter we look at one of the most touching events in the life of Peter. It is touching because it is so personal. And it is very important to us because you and I need to realize that what happened to Peter can happen to anyone of us.

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yes, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me (John 21:15-19).

The very essence of spiritual living and of spiritual service is not in our understanding of God's will; it is not because we know what Jesus Christ intended to do and how He was going to do it. It is love. That is the underlying dynamic. That is the reason why we do what we do. If your commitment to Christ is a rational conclusion, because that is the way you have it figured, then someone may come along and confuse your mind and he may disturb your figuring, and then you are in doubt. But nobody can change this. We love Him because He first loved us. Nobody can change that. When it is a matter of love, reason has no power. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee." "Feed my lambs." That is very simple, very direct. No argument, no reasoning why it would be good for them or because they need to have some improvement in their lot. No, simply, "Since you love me, do it." If we love Him we will want to please Him, to serve Him. And so He directs us.

"He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep." He asked the same question the third time and He was given the same answer and then He gave the same directions. "He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep." It seems that the common view that these three questions neatly matched the three denials is warranted. It should be noted that these questions from the Lord strike deeper into the heart.

When Peter was accused of being "one of the company" that followed Christ, he said "No." But when he was asked "Do you love me?" he gave a straightforward answer. "Yes, I do." Several aspects are to be noted. As long as Peter was merely following, and you remember he was following afar off, he could be tricked to deny the Lord. But when Peter was serving as a witness, when he was doing what the Lord wanted him to do, he was strong to testify. It is important to do something to express your love. "Feed my lambs." This is something that you will do for Christ's sake.

I think many times when I read material in our church paper, and oftentimes when I listen to our leaders, seeking to arouse in the membership a disposition to do certain things, to accomplish certain things, we find ourselves laying out all the good reasons why this is a good thing to do. Apparently the presumption is that when we have proven that it is the good thing to do, better than anything else, then we can expect that so far as the people are concerned, they will rise up and do it. That is the way it seems to be. And yet I wonder if we are on the right track. I wonder if that is the way in which we do it.

When people do anything at all around the church or for the church: perhaps teach a Sunday School class, perhaps take care of some of the rooms, or when they do anything for the Gospel, which is witness-

ing to people, going to their homes and asking them to come to church, visiting them when they are sick or whatever the case may be, any action that we take in our church work, what are we thinking about? Are we doing this because it is the good thing to do? Are we doing these things because people will appreciate it? Or are we doing these things because we want to have the name that we have done those things? Are we doing these things because people need us? Can you recognize in the light of what we have said here in this study, can you recognize that all of these are lesser reasons. They may all be true, but it is very doubtful whether anyone of them has the dynamic sufficient to move us into action when we have not been doing anything.

Do you realize what would be the proper thing? Let me put it to you this way, how would you feel about it if the reason why people went into the inner city to work among the poor was because of Christ, because that is what the Lord Jesus wanted them to do? Can you have in mind what a difference it would be in your own attitude when you went to visit the neighbors to invite them to church if you were doing this for Christ's sake because He wanted you to go there? If He wanted you to go there it would not matter so much what their reaction was. You would be very glad to have them come. You would feel very good about it if they would come. But if they did not come, you would still have done what you ought to have done because He wanted you to do that. I am laboring the point here, I realize, but I think you will get it and I want you to have it not because I want to find fault with other people, but rather for yourself.

Suppose you are teaching a Sunday School class, are you teaching that class for Christ's sake? Think it through and pray it through until you realize that the reason you go down and meet that class is because the Lord wants you to do it, and what you are going to talk to them about is what the Lord wants you to talk about, and what you are going to be praying for is what the Lord wants you to pray for. When you do those things, then you will find a real strength, I am sure. You will find a dynamic there that will be adequate.

Let me say again, as long as Peter was merely following Christ, he could be tricked to deny, but when Peter was serving as a witness for Christ, he was strong to testify. It is important to do something in serving the Lord. "Feed my lambs." So we see in the course of our meditation that the qualifications of an effectual witness is to love Him. We do what we do for Christ's sake. And let me urge this upon you, as simple as it is: in your own heart and mind anything that you are going to do around the church, anything that you are going to do in any church activities that you would count doing it as part of the church, do it for His name's sake. If you are going to give any money, give it to Him. If you are going to do any witnessing, go for His sake and make it that way because you love Him, because you want to please Him and He will direct you. The qualifications of an effectual witness for the Lord is love. We love Him because He first loved us.

Chapter 20

Peter And His Commission

It would seem that when the Lord told Peter what he was to do after the Lord was gone from his sight, He told him in two different ways, first by defining the work and then describing the procedure by which he would do it. So we notice in John these words in which He defined the work:

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep (John 21:15-17).

That is the definition of the work. It is very simple, isn't it? Everything else you do is to this end. But when we follow that we see how the Lord analyzed what this would mean for Peter. Now we read from verse 18 on:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me (John 21:18-19).

In order to do the work that the Lord wanted Peter to do, Peter would experience problems. Basically he would find that insofar as he wanted to do the Lord's will he would have to deny himself. As he started to serve the Lord his human nature would cause him to act independently. No matter what anyone else had done, he would do like this. He would want to do his work as he saw fit, when he saw fit, if he could not have it his way he would want to quit. This would, of course, be sinful inasmuch as it is basically selfish.

Many people I am sure do not understand this but we do well to pause here and meditate and look at this. "When thou wast young" that is when you were immature, when you were just starting out, "thou girdedst thyself," you hitched up your own clothing as it were, you rolled up your own sleeves and you went to work. "And walkedst whither thou wouldest;" you would do it the way you wanted to do it. "But when thou shalt be old;" this does not mean chronologically old and by that I mean it does not mean how many years you have, it is when you are mature. Some people are mature when they are sixteen years old. Some people are mature at twenty-two. It is when you are mature that "thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee." Now stretching forth thy hands is the way you would do when you were crucified, "and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." So the Lord pointed out to Peter that when he had become mature he would find that as he developed in self-denial, others would take advantage of him, and would work things around to where Peter would be doing things in ways that he previously did not want to do. "Another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." This disposition to do as he pleased would be a hangover from his natural, sinful human nature.

Peter started out in life as a natural man. The life in him was the life of Adam which was sinful. In his growing and developing Peter would learn patterns of selfish conduct that he would adopt as natural and proper even though they were selfish and sinful. In the course of this living with Jesus of Nazareth and his subsequent experience at Pentecost, Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. Thus he would be led to act in the will of God. This would mean that the disposition to deny self would be dominant in this person's spiritual being and he would finally reach the point where his natural disposition to do as he pleased would be completely changed to humble submission in any situation. In this condition he could expect others to take advantage of him at all times. "This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God."

It is not clear to me whether this implies that John wrote his Gospel after Peter had been crucified, and that that would be why he would write it this way. Tradition tells us that Peter was crucified by the Romans. And by the way, it is said in tradition that he asked to be crucified with his head down because he was not worthy to be crucified like his Lord, since he had denied Him. In any case, whether this statement (John 21:18) reflects that John wrote his Gospel after Peter's death, or that John had predictive insight as a prophet and knew that Peter was going to suffer that death, the fact remains that crucifixion was to be his fate. And at this point a very important truth comes to light:

Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me (John 21:20-22).

Here we see Peter acting again in such a human way. He has just been shown what his fate will be, to be put to death by crucifixion. Immediately his old natural self-interest prompts him to ask, "Why me? Why do you pick on me? Why not others too? Why not this man John?" One is reminded of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. Those who worked all day and received the same wage as those who worked only two hours complained because they felt they were entitled to more. Then the Lord reported that the owner of the vineyard did not honor their complaint. Had such men, such laborers, not received all that the Lord had promised? Then there was no room for complaint. This emphasizes that each of us deal with God personally.

I feel like going slowly here because this is so very important. He does not deal with me in comparison to others. God deals with me as I am. My task is not hard or easy compared to others. My task is mine, as big as it is, as heavy as it is, as hard as it is, as small as it is, as insignificant as it is, it is mine. God has me in mind. When He is dealing with me He is not thinking about anybody else. He is not comparing me with anybody else. It will help me if I will keep in mind that God gave His Son for me, just me, as if there was no one else in the world. He died for me as I am. He called me as I am to Himself to be His child. Then He gave His Holy Spirit to me as I am. And then he gave me tasks, gave me situations to live in. He overruled. He sets up the things I am to do. He ordains the work that I am to do. And He wants me to respond to Him as I am. I am not one in a multitude. I am not one in a crowd. I am alone with God.

God does not deal with me as I rate in a crowd, whether I am big or little. When He deals with me I am alone. That is the way I hurt, and that is the way I suffer, and that is the way I believe. So let us study this carefully. The Lord pressed the point in the very way He answered Peter, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" That sounds almost blunt. "Follow thou me." This distinctly makes it plain that I am to serve the Lord in my situation, not as one of a group, not as a member of the congregation, but as one person with his Lord. Certainly I am affected by others and by their actions but the real issue is to be settled between my Lord and me. And He says, "Follow thou me."

Chapter 21

Peter And The World

Peter had lived in the world as a normal human being. John tells us in I John:

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world (1 John 2:16).

This is where every human being is born and starts to live. This is the natural world. And each human person starts living here. Paul began his life here and although he was a very religious person, who had been "taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God" (Acts 22:3), and could say, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23.1), yet standing on trial before Agrippa Paul could say, "My manner of life from my youth . . . 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" (Acts 26:4-5). Yet moral and religious as Paul was, his own evaluation of his life was expressed in the words:

Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others (Ephesians 2:3).

It is possible that Paul's lust of the flesh was largely in "the desires of the mind" but he correctly understood them to be of "the flesh."

Peter's life may have been marked by different experiences than Paul's but he shows the same estimate of it in his own references. He gives advice to his fellow believers how they should act with reference to this world. We read:

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation (1 Peter 2:11-12).

That is the way Peter puts it. This is most basic, "strangers and pilgrims," believers who do not belong here in this world, and they are not going to stay here. The best way for believers to understand themselves is to think of themselves as foreigners or as tourists. "Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." And then Peter goes on to say:

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward (1 Peter 2:13-18).

With words like this the Apostle Peter advises the believers how they should live so far as this world is concerned. Just so a person lives in this world, he is first of all a human being. He has a body made of dust. This physical body has interests and desires of its own. This is what Peter has in mind when he writes of "fleshly lusts." It is interesting to note that all he has to say about such desires of the flesh is that they "war against the soul." Actually satisfying fleshly desires would be pleasant to the ego. Abstaining from them would involve self-denial. This would be healthy, in a spiritual sense.

Fleshly lusts can be physical, but they can also be mental. A person can have desires for satisfaction of physical appetites, but one can have desires for satisfaction of the ego, as well. I cannot think of Paul being enslaved by physical appetites but I would think of him being ensnared by vanity and pride in his prejudiced outlook.

As believers live in this world they are often irked by the ordinances of men. Sometimes these rules and regulations in the world seem so useless and so tedious. But Peter urges believers:

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well (1 Peter 2:13-14).

The reason that Peter gives is not based on any possible benefit to the believer, but for the sake of his personal testimony. We read on:

For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God (1 Peter 2:15-16).

As we live in this world we are often in the situation of being a servant. It is in this relationship that the believer has an excellent opportunity to glorify Christ in his conduct. By denying self the believer can serve acceptably before God.

Evidently Peter's manner of life before he became a follower of Christ was marked by ungodly conduct. We read:

For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries (1 Peter 4:3).

And he had learned from experience that the very people who shared such fleshly experiences with him were the very persons who objected and criticized him when he no longer shared with them in their fleshly excesses.

Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you (1 Peter 4:4).

While Peter would have conducted himself with meekness, he had in mind that God would in the Judgment Day deal righteously with all who had criticized and persecuted Peter for acting as led by the Spirit.

And so we have in this testimony of Peter a real insight into our own situation so far as the world is concerned. We are surrounded by it on all sides. I think that I can remind you and you probably all will recognize that years ago it was more customary for families to have patterns of conduct, rules of behavior, that they ingrained in their children. We could speak of how well a child was brought up, or how the child had come from a good family, or something of that nature. In this day and time that has been weakened a great deal. We do have parents who are still strong in their faith and they are anxious in their concern for their children. And we do have parents that actually want their children to avoid being involved in fleshly things, but the public no longer gives them any credit for where they are. They are called narrow minded. Commonly speaking, such parents are fighting a rear-guard action as we call it. Everything is going against them and they are doing the best they can to preserve what they have, but they are oftentimes just filled with dismay and with disappointments and with discouragement because it just seems that you cannot stop things going as they will. Just have in mind so far as the young people are concerned, that the whole world seems to be open to them, that they can do as they please.

This general permissiveness that we have in this day and time, would encourage young people to think that anything is all right, everybody is doing it. And you can get along that way, your parents do not agree with it but they are old fashioned and they are out of line, and things of that nature. I do not need to build that up, you know how it goes. And the result is that we are face to face with real spiritual problems because the young people, the children, falling into the ways of the world, will be led into those things that actually harm the soul. Remember we are to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. And this is exactly the situation that we face in our day and time. So with this in mind, we appreciate the

testimony that Peter gave and what Peter himself had to go through when he turned himself over to the Lord to follow Him.

I was glad to notice how that Paul himself had this same type of experience because we could think in the case of Peter that it was an exception because he lived the life of a fisherman, whereas Paul lived the life of a scholar. But you will find that Paul understood that the flesh was active in the mind as well as in the body. And so we turn from this study to our own problems as we go along day by day and we ask Almighty God to give us grace and strength that we might be able to turn to Him at all times and be willing to yield ourselves in self-denial into His will and have in mind that we will get no help from the world round about us. We have to feel about the world the way you would if you were in a boat and what you would feel about the lake or ocean. You will want to ride on it but you do not want to be in it, and that is the way it is so far as we are concerned. We ride on the water in the lake but we do not want the water of the lake to get in our boat. That sort of thing. But we really need help and we need help from Almighty God as we seek to live in this world.

Chapter 22

Peter And The Jewish Court

In this chapter we shall learn from Peter's experience a painful truth that would be incredible if it had not been openly demonstrated. In the record of what happened between Peter and the Jewish Court, we have an account of an actual event that we can study. Part of the reason for our feeling of shock is because the incident involved religion, and the parties involved were religious people.

The Jewish community in the Roman Empire were allowed within limits to govern themselves according to their own laws and customs. They were not permitted to assess the death penalty, but the leaders had the right to enforce their laws by any sanction which they deemed right. Different points of view were endorsed by different groups among the Jews. The most notable difference in points of view was manifested in the age-long traditional difference between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees were committed to the Scriptures, which they esteemed as the very Word of God. They accepted Scripture as literally true. They held to the doctrines of Scripture: the reality of God, the reality of heaven, the reality of the resurrection, the reality of eternal life, etc. The Sadducees did not accept the Scriptures as literally true: they denied the supernatural, they did not believe in heaven, nor in angels, nor in the resurrection. These two groups were always at odds with each other. Sometimes the High Priest was chosen from one group, sometimes from the other group. Both Pharisees and Sadducees were represented in the membership of the Council that had a function among the Jews similar to our Supreme Court today.

When Peter was arrested for disturbing the peace because of the excitement which aroused the Jews after the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, he was brought before the Council to be tried. Some of the Council members were Sadducees and they were opposed to Peter because of his preaching. It is written:

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).

Having gathered together an imposing gathering of prominent leaders, Peter and John were brought before them to be judged. And we read:

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. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this (Acts 4:5-7)?

Peter gave an open straightforward report in which he gave credit to the living Lord Jesus Christ in heaven as having exercised His power to effect this healing. Such testimony was not acceptable to the Sadducees in the Council who denied the reality of the resurrection. For them, Jesus of Nazareth could not be alive. Nor did Peter's testimony please the Pharisees because they had rejected the claims of Jesus Christ and had connived to have Him crucified. Peter and John gave their testimony so positively that the Council members were astonished. After all these two men were two fishermen confronting a company of learned scholars and important officials: The record is:

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

Calling them "unlearned and ignorant" does not mean they were stupid. It just means they were not educated. Apparently their being with Jesus would be since His resurrection because they sounded like eye witnesses, and after all, the eye witness has a certain edge to his testimony. He was there and he saw it and he can tell you what he saw. Any negative response the Council might have been tempted to give was blocked by two considerations, two circumstances. First, the healed man was there as evidence.

The Scripture records:

And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it (Acts 4:14).

In the second place the public knew the facts of what had happened. And so any opposition from the Council would be out of place. Because of this confusion as to how they should treat Peter and John, the Council members withdrew for private conference. We read:

But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred 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 we cannot deny it (Acts 4:15-16).

The Council decided to forbid them to testify in the name of the Lord Jesus. They could not afflict them in any way, they could not punish them in any way, they had not really done anything wrong, and so they just decided to forbid them to testify.

Peter left no doubt as to how he would accept such an order. We read Peter's response:

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. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard (Acts 4:19-20).

Because of the feeling of the public the Council released Peter and John. They had to let them go without punishment. We read:

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).

As soon as Peter and John were released they went to the other believers in the church.

And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them (Acts 4:23).

And then following that we read that they went immediately to prayer. They turned to God and asked God for help. The interesting thing is that in that praying that they did, in asking God for help, they did not particularly ask God to strike down all those Council members. They did not ask Almighty God to paralyze them or to have them drop dead. But they asked Almighty God for strength and grace to continue with their witnessing, asking Almighty God to strengthen them so they could speak boldly and tell the truth. That is all that they wanted to do. And so they asked for grace to help them.

This whole incident that we have read here, as I say, indicates something that is very common even though it is very amazing. Right in the field of what we call religion, how men feel about God, right there we have differences of opinion and the differences of opinion lead to opposition for each other. Interestingly enough everybody wants everybody else to agree with them in what they think about God and if they have reached certain conclusions about God, they do not want to hear anything else. Amazingly enough when a soul has been touched by the grace of God and the Spirit of God, and then undertakes to tell about it and speak about it and witness, many, many times the most bitter opposition comes from other people who also claim to know God but who have not had the same kind of experience.

It may be some soul has come to believe, after he lived in unbelief for some length of time. Finally he comes to believe, and when he comes to believe, the joy of being in fellowship with the Lord is overpowering. He is filled with joy and begins to tell what the Lord has done for him. The interesting thing is that, even though the Scriptures would indicate, for example, that people should be filled with the Holy Spirit, that believers should have the Spirit of God, that Christ in you is the hope of glory, it often happens that right in the very church where he is giving his witness and testimony, there will be opposition from people who have not had that kind of fellowship with the Lord. Because they have not had that kind of

experience, they feel that his testimony threatens them, and they oppose him.

Sometimes we will find far more bitter aversion between two denominations than we will find between the believer and the world outside. Actually you will find that in the denominations themselves there will be bitter opposition. There will be no fellowship between members because they do not agree with each other. For a new believer this is a very serious thing. The new believer has a feeling that everybody should appreciate the fact that he now belongs to God. Everybody should appreciate the fact that God has given him the Holy Spirit, and he should be able to talk about the Holy Spirit being in his heart as being normal. There will be other members in the very church where he is a member who never have done that. They have not had that experience, and they feel opposed to him. They will be inclined to ridicule him. They do not want to have fellowship with him. What is really the matter? He talks about the Holy Spirit, he talks about having fellowship with God, he tells about how the Lord Jesus asks him to do this and asks him to do that. Since this "old-timer" has never had anything like that happen; he has gone to church for years and years and years and has never had anything like that happen, he is inclined to say "That other person does not belong to me. He is just entirely different." All of this is brought to our minds when we think about Peter dealing with the Jewish Court. Right from them he had the most bitter opposition, and yet right there he bore his testimony for the reality of the things of the Lord..

Chapter 23

Peter And Sin In The Church

In this chapter we shall look at one of the most distressing facts of spiritual living, namely, "sin in the church." It is not so much a matter of there being sin among the members, because we understand there is no man that sinneth not; sin will be present. That is not really the problem. It is the attitude of the church toward sin that is the real issue.

In the incident that we shall note Peter was involved as one of the elders in the congregation. In God's economy in dealing with His people there is recognition of the fact that all believers are not at the same level of maturity in their relationship with Christ the Lord. God has sent His Holy Spirit into believers to make operative the marvelous truth, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." But just how this will affect the daily conduct of the believer is not always clear. A young believer may not realize how his conduct should be controlled to honor and glorify God.

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, 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. 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? While it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why has thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou has not lied unto men, but 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. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. 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? 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. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things. And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (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 5:1-14).

That is the account. It should be noted that in all of this we are not considering a question of stewardship. It was not a matter of requiring church members to give of their own property to help the group, to help the poor. As a matter of fact Peter implied that what the individual believer does with his personal property is a matter between himself and his Lord. He distinctly asked them if it was not true that at first the property was theirs; and even after they sold it, was not the money in their hands as their own? They could have done as they pleased. The issue was more basic than that, it was one of personal integrity.

Ananias and Sapphira conspired to deceive the company of believers, the church, into thinking that they had given all the proceeds to help the poor when actually they had not done so. What Peter charged them with was not that they were covetous or stingy, not that they were unmindful of the poor, but that they lied. "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?" It should be noted that Peter was acting as a member of the Body of Christ, and Ananias and Sapphira had lied in the presence of the church and had directly sinned against the Holy Spirit who was present in the believers. Peter, as one of the elders in the group, became aware of the sin and confronted the two. There is no indication that the results, the death of Ananias and the death of Sapphira was Peter's doing. We read, "And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost." In the case of Sapphira, Peter predicted the same fate for her, "Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost."

Apparently the death of Ananias and the death of his wife, Sapphira, should be understood more as the judgment of God. How it happened was not analyzed nor described, but there seems no reason to involve Peter in any personal way. And yet Peter was involved as an elder of the church. We are probably justified to feel that Peter acted as the elders should react. The sober tone of the record leaves the event as it stands

to serve as a warning to all believers. Apparently we should regard our communion in the group of believers very seriously. We should keep in mind that when we are communing with each other, we are communing with the Lord personally. The fellowship of believers should foster the Word of God by faith in our soul. Since "faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God" it seems obvious that the way in which faith can be nurtured is by reading and studying the Scriptures. Thus it would seem that a cardinal duty of the elders, in the congregation would be to promote Bible reading and Bible study.

When we stop to consider for ourselves, as members of the church, and especially when we consider our officers, our elders, who are to supervise our spiritual condition, what would you say about the situation when in the congregation there is very little Bible reading and very little Bible study and the elders do not complain about that. How are you going to understand that? How are you going to understand the fact that the elders do not personally push the matter of Bible reading and Bible study?

I think everyone of us would have in mind that the members of the Body of Christ should pray, that we should be actually nurturing our faith by communion with God in prayer. Now who should be supervising that? Is it not the elders that should be supervising that? Is it not the officers who are selected in the church and have been commissioned to do this thing that should be supervising? In some communions they are called elders, in some they will be called stewards, and in some they would be called deacons, but they are all officers that are elected to a position of responsibility. Should not they be concerned about the praying of the people? Suppose that your officers find that praying is not being done. Now I know that people can pray without going to prayer meeting. I realize that you do not have to come out on Wednesday night prayer meeting in order to pray. You can pray in your home. But on the other hand suppose the church does have a Wednesday evening prayer meeting. What are you going to say about officers who do not come? What are you going to say about officers who never share in that prayer meeting? How are you going to feel about them? And what would Peter say about them if they were to be brought to him? Would he not be asking, "Why hath Satan filled your heart" with disinterest about the matter of praying. How else can you account for it?

Consider the matter of membership visitation so far as your congregation is concerned. You know the early congregation went from house to house eating and drinking to the glory of God, praising God. What will you say about the congregation where the members do not meet each other, and where they do not have house to house gatherings? What shall we say about that? And how shall we feel about that with reference to the officers? What are the officers doing about cultivating and pushing membership visitation? Is it not possibly true that in many, many cases we have relegated that to paid servants? We have selected someone, perhaps, as Minister of Visitation and we have the additional members on the staff of the church and we leave it to them. Is that the way to do it? And what should the officers do about this thing? How much are the elders interested in and concerned about the visitation that is going on within the membership?

Consider the matter of the worship of God, arranging the public services to worship God. When we have, as we have seen in our day and time, so largely a discontinuing of the Sunday evening service, a discontinuing of the Wednesday evening prayer meeting, what do the officers do about this? How responsible would they feel? How would Peter feel if the people he was associated with were not attending public worship of God? And you have the Sunday morning service, what are you going to do about elders who do not come to the service? What are you going to do about members who do not come to the service? Should you do anything about it?

Consider the matter of missions. To what extent do the elders concern themselves with the missionary giving of their church? Would not failure in such duties be sin? Would this fact that the elders do not do this, that officers do not pay attention to these things, would this not show up in the dead, sterile congregational life? Would not this be part of the reason why in your church life, as a whole, your relationship to the church means so little? Is this not related to the fact that there are so few officers that will take person-

al responsibility about guiding the members into acceptable and desirable spiritual activity? This comes very close to home. This is actually sin in the church. And Peter, acting as one of the officers, one of the leaders, pinpoints it, draws attention to it. It has dire consequences. May the Lord help us that we can take these things to heart.

Chapter 24

Peter And The Samaritans

As we study Peter we can see the experience of a believer as he grows in understanding, in faith and in commitment in service. Now we are to see more of what happens to Peter because he is recognized as a leader among other believers. There are some things he must do because he is acting for the group as a whole. When he confronted Ananias with the evidence of Ananias' lying to God, Peter was acting for all the believers, for the church. This was in a somewhat negative fashion. Ananias had lied to God and that was wrong. Peter was the spokesman that pointed it out. But now we are to see Peter in the same role, spokesman for the church, but in a positive way.

Some time after Pentecost it is written:

. . . there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria . . . Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did (Acts 8:1, 5, 6).

Naturally this response on the part of the Samaritans became widely known. As striking as it sounds, many Samaritans became believers of the Gospel about Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew. It was widely understood that the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. The news of this response spread to Jerusalem.

Perhaps this would be a good time for me to point out to you that the Samaritans were the descendants of the northern tribes. You will remember when Israel as a nation was split up into two nations, ten tribes in the north went off and took the name Israel. Two tribes in the south were left to themselves with the city of Jerusalem and they took the name Judea. Now those northern ten tribes continued for a length of time until Assyria conquered them and carried the people away captive. When they carried the people away captive the land was left desolate. In order to make good crops they needed to be well worked, and the Assyrians did not know how to do it. The Israelites, whom they had moved out, were acquainted with what was necessary. In the course of time the northern group, the people who were brought back to work the land, settled around the city of Samaria, and the southern group, as you will remember, were chiefly around Jerusalem and in Judea. And so the time came that those people that came back from the northern tribes were called Samaritans because of the city of Samaria. The southern kingdom was called Jews because of Judea and about the time that the name Jew became prominent, the name Samaritan also became prominent. So actually in the Jews and the Samaritans you actually have cousins as it were. They all believed in God and they all had the Old Testament.

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 (Acts 8:14-15).

This brings to our minds an aspect of spiritual life which seems to be often neglected in our day and time. Certainly the first problem a soul faces in coming to God is his guilt for sins committed in the past, and in which the soul may now be enmeshed. Thus the first word any soul hears from the living God is "repent and believe." When this is done the soul is forgiven, reconciled to God and cleansed from all sin. But now the new believer must live as a child of God. He has habits of action which are sinful. He is surrounded by a world of sinful persons and he has no natural disposition to deny himself. He needs help to guide him to enable him to do God's will.

The provision God has in mind is that God will supply that guidance and that ability through Himself, in the person of the Holy Spirit. It is the heavenly Father's will to pour out His Holy Spirit into the newly regenerated heart of His child, the new believer. This reception of the Holy Spirit apparently was helped, activated by the ministry of others who had already received the Spirit.

When the believers in Jerusalem heard that large numbers of Samaritans had accepted Christ as they listened to Philip preaching, they recognized at once the need of these new converts to have the guidance and the strength of the Holy Spirit that they might live and act in the will of God. Thus they were moved to send their two leading ministers of the Word, Peter and John, to Samaria, that they might help these new converts live and act in the will of God to the glory of the Lord.

We might well take note of that for a moment. When they were sending help to these new converts they sent the two leading preachers they had down there. It was just that important to make sure that those people in Samaria who had accepted Christ would come to enter into the fullness of the Gospel by receiving the Holy Spirit into their hearts. This seems to me to be so very important. It is always wonderful to have a soul turn to God in coming to faith, but it is so very important that the new convert live and act in the will of God. All the habits of life in the natural man are developed in sin. The new convert must choose and act in living according to the will of God. This requires new and different patterns of conduct, and a new and different dynamic to guide conduct. This is provided, in the grace of God, by the indwelling Holy Spirit who will guide and activate behavior, making real for the believer, "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

In the course of his ministry in Samaria Peter was approached by Simon the Sorcerer, who wanted to purchase this gift of the Holy Spirit with money. The record shows that Peter sternly rejected this offer and warned Simon that he had offended God by even considering that the blessing could be purchased with money.

Later when the believers of the church met in Jerusalem to decide the policy of the church in the matter of receiving Gentiles into their fellowship, Peter spoke out definitely to bear witness to what he had been shown, namely, that God received the Gentiles and blessed them with the Holy Spirit even though they had not been circumcised according to the custom of the Jews.

In all such situations Peter was respected as a true leader of the church. The more we think about that, the more we should take note of this that when we as believers hear of any other person who becomes a believer by accepting Christ, we should have in mind that that is only the beginning. That is a matter that has to do with his past, that is a matter that has to do with his sins, with his guilt, and this is very, very important. We hasten to assure the new believer in Christ Jesus that the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ will cleanse him from all sins and this is true. But there is something else to be followed on from there. This new believer is to walk in the ways of God. For that he needs to know what the will of God is and needs to be minded to do it. It would be hard to put in just one sentence what the will of God will be. Let us just say that among other things it will include that I deny myself. It will be basically that I will follow in His ways, I will not go on my own way. I will deny myself. The denying of the self is difficult to do. It is like ignoring your shadow, you have to reckon yourself dead. This can be done with the help of the Holy Spirit.

The church in Jerusalem sent preachers down to the Samaritan believers to lead them in this. They were not going to be left to themselves. It was not something they were to work out. It was something they could be led into. We ought to have this in mind with reference to new converts. When anyone accepts Christ and starts walking with Him, we should be interested and concerned to know that that person learns more, and comes to understand further that the Holy Spirit is available. He may have the constant presence of God with him to guide him and to lead him and strengthen him in his life and work.

Chapter 25

Peter And Missions

The account of the progress of the gospel in the Book of Acts Seems to present two outstanding leaders in Peter and Paul. As the Gospel spread among the Jews in Jerusalem and in Judea, Peter seems to have been the dominant leader. Later when the Gospel spread among the Gentiles, Paul seems to have been the dominant figure. But Peter's ministry and leadership went beyond Jerusalem. He was used of God to lead in situations that developed outside of Jerusalem.

We have seen how the church at Jerusalem sent Peter and John to go to Samaria that they might minister the Holy Spirit to the new believers there. And after that we read:

And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also the saints which dwelt at Lydda (Acts 9:32).

We are not told whether Peter was on some specific mission similar to that which he had at Samaria, but we can be sure he was sensitive to the spiritual needs of the new converts. Apparently he was highly esteemed because he was brought into contact with Aeneas who had been sick with palsy for eight years and was bedridden.

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 9:34-35).

The evidence of Peter's faith had a profound effect throughout that region inclining men to turn to the Lord.

So it came to pass in the neighboring city of Joppa that the believers turned to Peter at a time of calamity. Among the believers there was a notable woman, Tabitha by name, who was also called Dorcas. And we read about her:

This woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did . . . 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. Then Peter arose and went with them (Acts 9:36, 38, 39).

We can see from this that when these people were distressed because a prominent woman in their congregation was sick and in trouble and they heard that Peter was near, they sent for Peter.

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 Joppa; and many believed in the Lord (Acts 9:40-42).

It is notable that faith in the Lord was not induced by any argument of any kind, but by demonstration in results in persons. This reminds me of Philip in Samaria. You will remember that they said about him when he went to Samaria that the people gave attention to the things that Philip said, "hearing and seeing the things that he did."

Some time later Peter was involved in extending the ministry of the Gospel among the Gentiles. This event centered around the experience of Cornelius, a Roman Centurion. The problem for Cornelius was that he was a Gentile. As we have noted, the Gospel came first to the Jews. On the Day of Pentecost when 3,000 people were converted, these were all Jews. Then Philip went down to Samaria. But the Samaritans were actually Israelites, and thus the Gospel had not been heard by Gentiles.

Cornelius was a Gentile. It is true that he worshipped God and acted in godly ways, but he was a Gentile. The custom of their society at that time was that no Jew would enter into any Gentile home. As a matter of fact it was a striking thing if a Jew was seen even talking to a Gentile. This would mean that no

believer, for they were all Jews, could come into the home of any Gentile to tell the Gospel.

God guided Cornelius to send to Joppa for Peter, telling Cornelius "he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do." Then God instructed Peter to go with the men whom Cornelius had sent "doubting nothing." God had sent a vision, like a dream, to Peter while he was on the housetop waiting for his noon meal. In that vision Peter had been told to kill and eat animals whose flesh had not been declared to be "kosher." Peter demurred because he ate only meat that was "kosher." And he indicated to God that he never killed anything that was unclean, never eaten any meat that was unclean. But God told him "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." This was done three times in the vision.

And while Peter was wondering what this vision could mean for him, three men from Cornelius appeared at his door requesting that he come with them. They were Gentiles and to go with them would be breaking away from tradition. But the Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God, told Peter to go with these men, nothing doubting. Peter did and entered into the house of the Gentile, Cornelius. This was strictly against the tradition of the times. Cornelius told Peter how God had led him to send for Peter. Peter recalled the vision which he had been told three times "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." And now he understood that God was telling him that on His death on Calvary Christ Jesus had carried away the sins of the whole world, including the sins of the Gentiles.

Before Peter had finished his telling of the Gospel story to Cornelius, God sent the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius and his company. Peter recognized this as evidence that God had accepted the Gentiles even as He had accepted the Jews. After this Peter went immediately to the church, the believers in Jerusalem, and explained how it was that he had been led to ignore man-made tradition that he might tell the Gospel to Cornelius the Gentile and to his people.

Later the church was aroused over the controversy about accepting Gentiles as brethren in the Lord, Gentiles who had not been circumcised according to the Jewish tradition. When that controversy arose Peter gave his testimony of what God had shown him in the case of Cornelius. So in a very real sense Peter opened the door at Pentecost to the Jews, opened the door in Samaria to the Samaritans and finally here with Cornelius, he opened the door to the Gentiles at Jerusalem.

So we see and understand and appreciate that Peter was definitely involved in the spreading of the Gospel, particularly in its initial phases. God used this man, this Jew, who had personally come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and had walked with the Lord Jesus Christ. God used him to be the one to open the door for these other groups of people. This is another one of those cases where we can see how God will use the personality of the individual. In reading the story of the Bible, the New Testament, one is impressed by the fact that Peter was a strong man, strong in his own personal testimony. What Peter believed and what he was personally committed to, he did not hesitate to tell anybody anywhere, any time. This is the kind of man that could step out across the line when God called on him to do so. Because human beings draw lines, human beings set up traditions, human beings have it fixed that you do not go here and you do not go there, you do walk with these people, you do not walk with those people. As you look in the Bible you will find that men draw these things up in a human way. In order for the Gospel to spread so that it can spread equally to all men everywhere, these man-made traditions must be ignored. And Peter was the very one who could do it and he did it. Peter was the man who got up on the Day of Pentecost and interpreted what happened in the coming of the Holy Spirit. He told the Jews and did it so effectively that 3,000 of them were converted. Later when Philip went down to Samaria and preached the Gospel to them, and a great many Samaritans believed, and the church became concerned that these new converts should have the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their living, they sent Peter and John down to Samaria that they should pray for them that the Holy Spirit might come upon them. Later Peter was called on to go to the house of Cornelius. There he recognized the guidance of the Lord in such a way that he crossed over the barrier of tradition, went into the house of the Gentile and gave them the Gospel story. So Peter's relationship to missions is very, very strong, and very significant, and we are thankful to God

that He had a man like Peter that He could use in this way.

Chapter 26

Peter And Tradition

We are indebted to Peter for many insights into the truth of the Gospel, but none more than what he revealed to us in his dealing with tradition. There are three conditions which present hindrances in the communication of the Gospel. If a soul has not heard nor understood the story of what Jesus did on the cross, in the resurrection and in the ascension, we recognize that as ignorance. This condition can be cleared up easily by information such as Philip gave the Ethiopian in his chariot in the desert. The second condition hindering the Gospel is illustrated by Saul on the Damascus road. Saul knew about Jesus of Nazareth and was minded to do many things contrary to Jesus of Nazareth. Paul's condition we recognize as prejudice. This was cleared up by the direct action of God in confronting Saul on the Damascus road. The third condition was illustrated in Cornelius, the Roman centurion. Cornelius was a Gentile and as such, no Jew was to have any dealings with him. Since all the believers were Jews or Samaritans, there was no opportunity for any witness for Christ to come into contact with the Gentile, Cornelius. This condition we recognize as tradition. Peter was involved in overcoming this barrier with the Gospel.

On a given day while Cornelius, a Roman centurion, a Gentile, was praying to God, he was told by the Lord to send men to Joppa to fetch Peter who would tell Cornelius what he ought to do. Because of tradition, Peter would not be free to have any dealings with the Gentile, Cornelius. On that day Peter was on the housetop waiting for his noon meal, and in a vision Peter saw a great sheet let down from heaven which contained all manner of beasts, both kosher and such as were not kosher. Then a voice told him, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. Peter demurred, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." "And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven" (Acts 10:13-16).

While Peter was thinking about this vision and wondering about its meaning, the men from Cornelius arrived at his door. And we read:

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 (Acts 10:19-20).

As a result Peter came to the house of Cornelius, and went in, contrary to tradition. As a Jew he was not expected to do this but he did it, and he told them the Gospel. God confirmed the faith of these Gentiles by sending the Holy Spirit, even as He did upon the Jews at Pentecost.

As soon as Peter got back to Jerusalem he was confronted by Jews. They accused him:

Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them (Acts 11:3-4).

I am impressed by the meekness and humility of Peter. Though he had been led by God in what he had done, he patiently explained to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem so they could share in what had happened.

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).

Because tradition is such a common hindrance to the communication of the Gospel, we should perhaps examine Peter's conduct a bit more closely. The custom of forbidding a Jew to enter the home of any Gentile was established at a time when the Gentiles and their pagan practices were actually a threat to the Jews. There was always the danger that the Jews would be influenced to adopt Gentile ways of living. By maintaining separation this danger was avoided.

At this point I am conscious of a handicap we face because of tradition today. Several generations ago

it was common to find bitter argument and open opposition between denominations because of sharp differences of the understanding of the Gospel. As time has moved on these differences have largely disappeared. Today we find church services in various Protestant denominations to be very similar. There are some actual differences in church organization and administration but these differences are readily accepted by everyone.

The big source of controversy amongst us today is largely to be found in doctrine but generally such differences are found side by side in every denomination. I find myself to be in close fellowship with believers in other denominations, closer than with some in my own group.

God in His providence has raised up true believers in every denomination, while at the same time error has spread into every group. It is no longer possible that you can say this church stands true and this church is not true. That is not the way it goes. Actually this church has folks in it that are real believers and folks in it that are just superficial and that church, that denomination, has folks in it that are real and folks that are just superficial. And that other denomination has in it folks that are real and folks that are just superficial. That is just the way it is, so much so that you can no longer distinguish people by their denominational relationship.

But Peter is an example of how tradition can be overcome. To be led of the Lord is the solution of the problem of tradition. It seems that when men try to explain the Gospel in their teaching, the tendency is to emphasize some aspects of the truth while ignoring some other important aspects. And unfortunately when this happens some aspects are distorted while some others are ignored. This weakens spiritual life and experience.

I think in this connection that I am helped to understand what this is like when I remember the origin of a cartoon. You all know what cartoons are like, you see them in the newspapers. Cartoons illustrate stories that deal with our national figures. If you will notice those cartoons, general features are recognizable but then the artist in illustrating this emphasizes some feature. It may be the man with a long nose, so the cartoonist puts an extra long nose. It may be the man with big ears, so the cartoonist puts extra big ears. It may be the man has a prominent chin, so the cartoonist draws a very definitely prominent chin. All of these are exaggerated. We recognize who this is by the general picture but the exaggeration makes it funny, and they are put in the paper for that reason. In doctrine, in Bible doctrine, this same thing can happen. When people are telling each other what the Bible means and are explaining it, they will take some feature that especially impresses them and emphasize it away ahead of the other parts. This is true enough but it is altogether out of proportion. The truth is that much of the truth of the Gospel is seen in the proportion; it comes in the balance that there is. You can take any one part of the Scripture and exaggerate to the place you will get something that is not true. The picture is a cartoon.

That is the origin of heresy. There is an element of truth in every heresy; if there wasn't, the heresy would soon die out. It is because there is an element of truth in it that the heresy persists. But what makes it a heresy, and by that I mean a wrong doctrine, is that it is out of proportion. For instance, so far as we are concerned, interest in prophecy is proper. There is nothing wrong with it. The disciples had it. But a person can become so taken up with prophecy that he neglects prayer.

Interest in evangelism is basic and very important but you can get so interested in evangelistic activity that you neglect fellowship with God which is essential. A cartoon is produced by simply exaggerating one aspect of a photo. To enlarge upon anyone feature of this picture changes the whole appearance. This seems to be involved so far as our ordinary spiritual experience is concerned.

Peter would have us in one denomination actually going to attend meetings held in another denomination, as long as they are telling the truth and as long as they are worshipping God. Peter did this, not because he was so wise and not because Peter was so smart, but he did this because he was led of the Lord. The Lord led him to go to the house of Cornelius, and the Lord led him to tell Cornelius the truth. The Lord led Cornelius to believe. And so in our day and time we can expect that this will happen. Do

not be surprised if you find people who come out of other denominations or other groups, or who may not belong to any denomination at all, when they talk about the Gospel they may tell the truth in a way that will actually benefit your soul. Peter taught us much in the way in which he dealt, but it was the Lord teaching us through Peter how to deal with tradition.

Chapter 27

Peter In Prison

In our study in this chapter we must stay very close to what the Bible tells us. We are about to consider an aspect of Peter's experience that is unique, to say the least. In Acts we have the story of Peter in prison. This whole story is so unusual and exceptional that we should read it as it is reported.

And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) 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. Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. 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. 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 garments 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. 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: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. And when Peter was come to himself, 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. 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. 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. But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. 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 show these things unto James, and to the brethren. 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. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and there abode (Acts 12:3-19).

As we approach this story we need to remember that we are living here on earth where hostile persons operate that would oppose, hinder, threaten us as we serve in the Lord. In our earthly situation we are confronted and beset by situations in which Satan can arouse opposition and inspire activity that will harm and hinder our service in the Lord. Thus we read "And he killed James the brother of John with the sword" (Acts 12:2). This is difficult to grasp: was not James a believer? Was he not doing God's will in personally witnessing for Christ? Then how can this happen? Here is a witness actually put to death. We need to remember "The servant is not greater than his master." Satan was able to inspire ungodly men to kill Jesus Christ, and he has from time to time inspired men to resist the witness of the Gospel by killing believers.

Not long ago the whole western world was shocked when a missionary, a Wycliffe Bible Translator, was kidnapped and threatened with death if the Wycliffe Bible Translators would not leave that country. This happened. The missionary was killed. Much prayer had been offered to God that this man should be spared, but he was not spared. Even as James, the brother of John, was not spared before Herod. We need to ponder this truth concerning Chet Bitterman.

The fact is that not every believer will be called upon to stand up to be shot. But Satan has ways of persecuting the Lord's people besides inspiring folks to kill them. A believer may be working in an office where some ungodly person may be in a position to harass him. A woman may be married to a man who mistreats her. Would she not pray for deliverance? She may do that and pray earnestly, and yet have no relief. At times like this we must lift our eyes still higher.

Fortunately we have Scripture to help us. In Hebrews we read of some believers who were called to suffer in serving the Lord. The Scripture tells us:

. . . and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourging, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect (Hebrews 11:35-40).

This is a sobering yet glorious truth. Often in history sincere, earnest believers have endured suffering because they believed and confessed their faith in public, even as "James, the brother of John" who was "killed with the sword." Such was the fate of Peter.

Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread) . . . Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him (Acts 12:1-5).

As I think about this praying, I wonder what they were asking for? I personally do not think they were asking that Peter be released. It was a time of general persecution. Herod had killed James, and then arrested Peter intending the same fate for him. I would think the church expected Peter to be killed also. Then what would they be praying for? They would share with Peter in his distress, expecting him to be killed. Here we can learn an important lesson. In praying for a fellow believer in distress, we need not to focus our petition upon his immediate deliverance. It may not be God's will to deliver. It may be His will that this should happen as it did to James. As we read in Hebrews, some were delivered but some were not. And all this was in the will of God!

In Peter's case, we have the record of an astonishing act of God in which He delivered Peter from prison by means of an angel opening the door. When Peter came to the home where the church was gathered, the believers could not believe that he was real. This was not, as some imply, that they could not accept the answer to their praying, this was not what they were praying for! This was "more than they could ask or think." We may note that Peter did not exploit this turn of events to his own glory. He makes no mention of it in his letters which were written later. But we should not fail to learn something of the ways of God in all this experience of Peter.

Let us not forget that there are hostile forces around who actually are against us. These forces seek our harm. It is a great comfort to know that God is watching over His own in a protective way. This confidence however will challenge our personal relation to God. It is so easy to remember Job and to assume that what was true about Job will apply in our case, but we need to face facts. Job was a righteous man who served God with all diligence. I am not at all sure that a careless person could claim that God would care for him as He cared for Job.

But even so, Job was subjected to all manner of distress because God permitted Satan to afflict Job with injury to his possessions and to his health. As it turned out, Job was enabled to glorify God by his faithful dependence upon God. We all remember how Job almost defiantly declared, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."

We should be warned against assuming that every day will be fine and fortunate. This can lead us into confusion. Some have unusual trouble because they have assumed that believing in Christ meant that all would be sweetness and light. And so when they have trouble they are shocked!

In order that we might be wise in the ways of the Lord we study this example of the experience of Peter. We remind ourselves that trouble is routine, it is to be expected. But it will never be overwhelming. God will not have forgotten us. God will take care of us and we can trust in Him.

Chapter 28

Peter And Church Councils

In our study of Peter we learn much for our own guidance. Just now we are to see that Peter was not alone as a believer. He was one of a number of believers that in the New Testament was eventually called the church. As long as Jesus of Nazareth was present as one of the group here on earth, the matters of policy were in His hands. He took care of everything. He told them what to do.

But when He was gone in person, after His ascension into heaven, the matter of leadership became a problem. Granted that the Holy Spirit was given to be in the heart of each believer to guide the believer in the will of God, this left open to question what should be the course of procedure that the group should follow?

Here again the Holy Spirit in the believers should lead them. But how would the Spirit's will be recognized. Fortunately we have a classic illustration.

In the course of their missionary witness, Barnabas and Paul had seen Gentiles come to faith. As believers in Christ these Gentiles joined the larger group of believers now known as the church. As more and more Gentiles joined the church, some of the church members became uneasy because this meant that there were persons who had not been circumcised after the manner of the law of Moses, who were being accepted in the church as the people of God.

From among the church members who had been brought up as Jews, certain persons began to object to such Gentiles being accepted as full-fledged believers in Christ. They began to teach that anybody and everybody who claimed to be a member of the church should be circumcised after the manner of the law.

This was directly contrary to the understanding of Paul and Barnabas. I do not think that Paul was ever in any doubt as to the truth involved. I feel sure that he knew the truth as he afterwards set it forth in his epistle to the Galatians. But now I can learn something very important.

Apparently Paul recognized that as an evangelist his procedure was accepted in public as being the mind of the church as a whole. This would be so much more authentic if the church as a whole approved what he had done after responsibly studying the matter.

Paul knew there were church members who sincerely believed Jewish circumcision was necessary for proper membership in the church. Just as there were church members who did not believe that. It was important for the fellowship of the church and for their testimony before the world that the whole church should agree on their public testimony. So Paul and Barnabas went up to the Council in Jerusalem to explain the basis of their procedure, seeking the approval of the whole church. I feel that Paul was assured in his heart that the Holy Spirit would lead the church to a good conclusion.

The fact remains that Paul and Barnabas showed their personal appreciation of the importance of church unity in the promotion of evangelism. There is much for us to learn in this. Today a vast multitude of professed believers is repeatedly disturbed by serious controversies. This seems to be an inevitable consequence of the fact that church members are human. In many of our controversies the tendency seems to be, judge the other fellow who differs with us, not only as wrong, but as one with whom we will have no fellowship. This seems to be a serious defect. Differences may be real, and as the various points of view are expressed they may seem irreconcilable, but the problem is in our human understanding, not in the truth of the matter.

My right hand and my left hand are different, they are unlike, and yet they are both mine and I am better off for having both. The five fingers on either hand are all different, but they are all necessary for the full function of my hands.

To insist upon identical likeness is not natural and not wise. If all my fingers moved as a unit, I would not have a hand, I would have a flipper. One of the distressing hindrances today is that the church has allowed doctrine and theological differences to be the basis for division among believers. This is very

unfortunate. Every individual concept of truth is unique. Exactly alike expressions are forced. The truth in any situation is complete. Any human concept is only partial. It is the natural difference between the human concepts that are basic in all controversies. That is what makes us fuss. I differ with the other man: I think differently than he does and he thinks differently than I do, and if we start emphasizing our differences we can be drifting apart. The point is neither one of us understood it all. Our minds are not that big. God is more than we are, and the truth is about God.

In the history of God's people many differences have emerged as believers have expressed their views on this or that matter. It has often happened that believers have adopted some popular view and have committed themselves to each other in organized fashion, thus denominations have been formed. Controversy has become bitter. In the heat of argument believers have become so partisan that members of one denomination will not have fellowship with members of another denomination. In all such cases the reality of belonging to Christ has often been overlooked.

The solution in any controversy would begin by recognizing the reality of the believer's relation to Christ. When Paul and Barnabas went up to the church in Jerusalem to decide this matter, they counted that all those folks in Jerusalem were believers. Not all those people agreed with each other, but they were all believers. So we say, the solution in any controversy begins by recognizing the reality of the believer's relation to Christ. After all, Christ is one, and the Holy Spirit is one, and just as surely as the individual members will think of Christ and yield to the Holy Spirit they will be led into an experience of the unity that is in the truth.

Such unity is not to be found among people. You do not find that unity among human beings. An understanding of the limitations of human thought together with humble self-denial will help, but this is what is so difficult. It is so difficult to recognize that I do not know everything. What I know, what I feel I know and the way I understand it, that is for me. My faithfulness should be judged according to the way I measure up to my own understanding about these things. But my judgment of the other man should be tempered by my constant understanding of the limitations of human thought. If I will understand the limitations of human thought so that I know that I do not know everything, the other man may have his point of view. From his point of view, that is the way he feels, then if there is in me humble self-denial, this will help different believers to overlook differences in points of view.

In the case of Peter the church Council issued a formal statement in the form of a letter which expressed the view to which all could subscribe. And it resulted, in that case, in peace, and in the ongo of the evangelism to which they were committed. All this is set forth in the hook of Acts.

And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them. Men and brethren. ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gen- tiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them wit- ness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. 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? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name (Acts 15:7-14)

This is what we read in the book of Acts in which we get the result of this incident when Paul and Barnabas went up to the Council to have this matter settled. It was the testimony of Peter that led them to recognize the reality of the Gentile experience. Then it was the word of James that confirmed them in the judgment that they should accept this as being in the will of God. In all of this we see a wonderful guidance for us. In the differences that we feel and the differences that are actually there, those differences arise in our human limitations and should be recognized as such. There is one thing that does not come out of us, that is the unity that is in Christ. That is what we have in Him and when we come to Him and we draw nigh unto Him, we find ourselves drawing nigh unto all other believers everywhere.

Chapter 29

Peter and Paul

In our study of the Early Church as the record is set forth in Acts, we note several prominent leaders. Outstanding in their importance are Peter and Paul. It is quite noticeable that Peter is prominent in the opening chapters of the book, and Paul is prominent in the latter half of the record. It is also obvious that in the early history of the church the majority of the members were Jews, whereas in the latter years the Gentiles were being included in ever increasing numbers. We shall be noting how very fitting it was that when the church Council in Jerusalem assigned responsibility of service, the judgment was that Peter should minister to the Jews and Paul to the Gentiles. Paul understood this as did the church at Jerusalem. We read in Galatians such words as this:

But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (for he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision (Galatians 2:7-9).

In these words of Paul there are several important principles to recognize. First, obviously the church recognized the presence of both Jews and Gentiles. In the eyes of the Lord these were all lost sinners that needed salvation. However, in the eyes of the world, as human beings, they were notably different. Paul understood very well that there is one God, one Lord, one Savior and that in the eyes of the Lord "there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:12-13).

Since salvation is not earned there would be no significance in comparing the Jew and the Greek. It is to the glory of God that He is "no respecter of persons." Sinners are not graded since they are all lost without Christ. For that matter, believers are likewise not graded. The fact is that, "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). This matter of becoming a believer is not based upon who you are or what you are. And as you grow as a believer, the distinctive part, the significant part of a person, is not his own personal contribution. It is what the Lord will do in him.

Now the second principle we see in this section is that the church also recognized that Jews and Gentiles are different from each other. It is notable that the Jewish believers who were in the majority in the Council referred to the Gentile believer with personal humility. So when Peter reported what had happened in the house of Cornelius when he presented the Gospel to the Gentiles, he showed real humility in what he said. "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they" (Acts 15:11). One can feel how he put himself and the Jewish people below the Gentiles he was talking about. When the church sent word of their judgment to the Gentile believers they addressed them as "brethren." There was not any intimation that they esteemed the Gentile believers to have any inferior status.

Nevertheless, the church did recognize that there were actual notable differences, when they sent Paul to be the apostle to the "uncircumcision" and Peter to be the apostle to the "circumcision." This would not mean one group was any more acceptable to God. The recognized difference was a matter of their culture, and their social background. Some believers had been born into Jewish homes and had been circumcised as a matter of custom. Other believers had been born outside the Jewish community and so they had not been circumcised. These were differences of course, but not spiritually significant.

We may recognize at once that there would be personal advantages in the case of children born into a home where the Scriptures were known and respected, but the fact of sin made all persons guilty before God. Paul discussed this in his epistle to the Romans and in the course of which discussion Paul wrote:

"For there is no respect of persons with God" (Romans 2:11), and again he wrote:

What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one (Romans 3:9-10).

And he concludes this discussion by saying "That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God" (Romans 3:19).

The third principle we note is when the church sent Peter to the Jews and Paul to the Gentiles. A significant truth can be seen about the providence of God in the preparation of these two servants of God for the function each was to perform. It is obvious from the scriptural record that Peter grew up as a boy in strict Jewish custom. On the occasion of the vision that he was given on the housetop, when he was commanded in his dream to eat food that was not ceremonially clean, it was not kosher; he demurred saying, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean" (Acts 10:14). That would be the testimony of a person who grew up in a home where there was very real care about their religious practices. We know he was a fishing partner with James and John and that he was sent as one of the apostles in preaching and teaching among the Jews. He could minister the Gospel to the Jews because he was so totally one of them.

The background of Paul's experience was so different. Now he also was a man who was born a Jew and was thoroughly grounded in the Jewish religion, as he himself reports in Philippians:

Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless (Philippians 3:5-6).

This is the way Paul could describe himself. But he grew up in a Greek city where he had learned to speak Greek. He was born the son of a Roman citizen and so by birth he had the benefits of being a Roman citizen. Apparently he was conversant with Greek culture. In school he had the advantage of being a pupil of the great Gamaliel.

Thus this great servant of Christ Paul was thoroughly familiar from birth and childhood with all the traditions of the Jews, as well as learned in all the culture of the Greeks, and so was providentially equipped to be the spokesman for the Gospel in the whole Roman empire, both Jews and Greeks. On occasion he could identify with the Jews in observing tradition which he knew from childhood, as when he joined four other men in taking a vow. We read this in Acts 21:20-26.

Something of Peter's limitations can be noted from Paul's account in Galatians 2:11-16 where Peter was rebuked for separating himself from the Gentiles. This incident is not described at length or in detail. But we should note the difference with which Peter refers to Paul in one of his later letters when he writes in II Peter 3:15 "even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you." Such an incident can be helpful to us in warning us to beware of the pull, the influence, that social relationships can have in influencing our own conduct.

It might be helpful for us to notice that passage in Galatians because it is so very widely referred to from time to time. We read Paul's own account of the matter:

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him: insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-15).

Peter could make a mistake but Paul was able to make that straight and to correct him in that manner.

In all of this discussion we have seen two great men, both used in leading God's people. And we have also seen something that is more important than we are able to refer to just now. Believers can be different and the treatment that they receive, the leadership that they will respond to, can be different. Sometimes one person can lead well in a situation and sometimes another person can lead better in another situation. This causes us to be humble in our judgment of our fellow workers. We never know whom God is going to call, or whom God is going to use.

Chapter 30

Peter And The Unity Of The Church

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us (John 17:21).

In these words the Lord prayed for His believers, whom we commonly call "the church." So much of the Gospel truth is focused upon the relation of the believer to God (Father, Son and Holy Ghost) but there is an aspect of the truth of the Gospel that deals with all the believers as a group. Here in relation is focused upon all believers as a group in the world, man to man, person to person.

In this passage "one" is used not as a numeral but as a whole. There is a sense in which all believers are seen as one unit, and they serve in the world as one unit, often referred to as the Body of Christ.

Paul discusses this aspect of the truth in I Corinthians chapters 12, 13 and 14 where he uses the figure of the human body as a type of the company of all believers. He particularly points out that though there are many members in one body, and these members may be as different from each other as a hand and a foot, or an eye and a mouth, they are yet all one body. So believers may differ from each other and yet all belong to each other in the one body.

All this seems plain enough, but the realization of the unity among the believers is difficult to achieve. The difficulty is lodged in the human nature of the members. This is because human nature is naturally sinful. The natural man is self-centered and self-preoccupied. When we see a baby reach out to pick up any- thing that may belong to someone else, we are not offended. We say, "Oh, that is just a baby. It does not know any better." We just naturally expect any baby to take anything it can reach. Commonly we are not conscious that this is the very essence of sin!

Also we are usually not aware that this is the very trait in human nature that causes men to separate from each other into particular and smaller units. Until something can be done about this selfish trait in the natural human heart, all efforts to bring unity into any social group is doomed to failure.

At once we realize that this was exactly what was done when the company of believers were born again in Christ Jesus. We read of how believers were affected.

And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need (Acts 2:44-45).

There is another scripture that records this result from accepting Christ:

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common (Acts 4:32).

This frame of mind is only possible when the heart is changed. The natural person would not be like that. But the spiritual person, the one who is born again in Christ Jesus, has that trait, that characteristic. Paul describes this unity among believers in this way:

Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

Paul follows this by noting how the human body has many members, but all these members are one body. But this blessed state is not possible as natural man, but only as spiritual.

In the time when Jesus of Nazareth lived on earth, the tendency to withdraw from others had produced a traditional separation between Jews and Gentiles. This was so severe that the spread of the Gospel was hindered. The thousands of believers after Pentecost were all Jews. But the Jews were separated by tradition from both the Samaritans and the Gentiles. As matters turned out it was Peter and John that went to Samaria to prepare the Samaritans to have fellowship in the church.

Then in a classic instance, Peter was directed by God in a vision to ignore tradition and to enter the

Gentile home of Cornelius and to share the Gospel with him. God confirmed Peter's action by sending the Holy Spirit upon them even as He had done at Pentecost.

The fact was that the traditional separation of Jews and Gentiles was actually a result of the sinful tendencies in their natural hearts. It was significant that the Lord used Peter who was a Jew in the strictest sense, to be the messenger to the Gentiles. In this way it would be obvious that the Gospel which Peter preached should not be hampered by traditional customs which had developed in sinful tendencies.

The Gospel today is being spread by public utterance in a world that is broken up into many separate groups. Such groups have divergent histories. What Peter did would be like an instance in which an Episcopalian Archbishop would report to his church membership that the charismatics should be accepted as brethren in Christ.

The situation in our current time is quite difficult because of our social climate. Our society that we live in is featured by two opposing tendencies. First, we encourage self-interest by emphasizing the desirability of achieving self-esteem. We praise efforts to realize the highest possible potential of self. We are all acquainted how it is in our schools when we seek to bring some form of order into the company of children that are at the school. When we try to achieve anything we, one way or another, seek to set up a situation in which there will be competition. And when there is competition one with another, you understand, of course, the very essence, the very driving force in competition is self-esteem. "I want to be first," and then I compete with everybody else.

We praise efforts in the schools and everywhere to realize the highest possible potential of self. And we actually make speeches about it. We write books about how the important thing is to find self, to realize self, to amount to something in yourself, and so on. We are not conscious of the fact, I am sure many times, that what we are doing is actually playing into the hands of Satan. That is exactly what he wants us to do. If I can be interested in making something of myself I am just open to all kinds of sinful ideas. I often wonder whether or not believers realize that the Lord Jesus said that if anybody wants to be a follower of His, the first thing they are to do is to deny self. And the next time you hear anybody emphasizing about the individual making something of himself, just have in mind so far as the believer is concerned, the one thing he is to do about himself is to deny himself.

But there is another principle that is active, another element. We relegate responsibility for public conduct to organized groups away from personal responsibility. You would be surprised how many people are not willing to accept the challenge of the need of the poor. "The church will take care of that. because after all that is the church's business." Who is the church? That is the company of the people. And those who emphasize group action in that way are actually getting rid of personal responsibility. We relegate responsibility for public conduct to organized group action and this is away from personal responsibility. So in the first place, we clamor for individual liberty which provides ground for license. It is popular today to encourage everyone to do his own thing and then we expect the home, the church, the school to bridle our tendencies, these tendencies that cause us to withdraw from each other, each one trying to get ahead of the other, each one seeking to make sure that he gets there first. But such is not the outlook nor the trust of the believer in Christ. Peter was called upon as a Jew to go to the Gentiles and preach the Gospel to them. In the testimony of Peter afterwards at the church Council in Jerusalem, you will remember he told how God had made no difference justifying the Jewish heart just as He did the Gentiles. That is the way Peter put it. And so we have in mind so far as the unity of the church is concerned, that is the outward body of the church, the problem is that the tendencies of the individual members of the church in their sinful nature is to go their own way and separate from others. Groups cling together, me and my wife, my son John and his wife, us four and no more, that kind of thing is liable to be common amongst us all.

PLAIN TALK
ON

Paul

By Dr. Manford George Gutzke

Table of Contents – Paul

31. Who Is An Apostle?	74
32. The World Of Paul	76
33. Paul As A Jew	78
34. Paul As A Pharisee	80
35. Paul On The Damascus Road	82
36. Paul As A New Convert	84
37. Paul And Barnabas	87
38. Paul As A Missionary	90
39. Paul As A Preacher	92
40. Paul As A Pastor	95
41. Paul As A Teacher	97
42. Paul As An Apostle	100
43. Paul As A Witness	103
44. Paul On Trial	105
45. Paul And His Critics	107
46. Paul's Message About Sin	109
47. Paul's Message About Salvation	111
48. Paul's Message About Israel	113
49. Paul's Message About Living In Faith	116
50. A Church In Trouble	118
51. Paul In A Congregation	121
52. The Gospel Of Grace	124
53. The Church As The Body Of Christ	126
54. The Joy Of The Lord	129
55. Life In Christ	132
56. The Model Church	135
57. The Second Coming	138
58. The Young Minister	141
59. The Latter Days	144
60. Pastoral Care	147

Chapter 31

Who Is An Apostle?

And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles (Luke 6:13).

The word "apostle" simply means "the sent one." When a message is sent out in a letter, we call that an epistle. But when a person is sent out with a message we call him an apostle. The messenger that carries the message on the mission is the apostle. Actually every believer who has ever heard the Great Commission "Go ye into all the world and teach all nations" and has been sent with the message, is an apostle so far as function is concerned. The Lord said about sending out His own, "As my Father hath sent me, so send I you."

Paul was not one of the original twelve, and yet he is commonly known as Paul the Apostle or the Apostle Paul. In fact he speaks of himself saying:

For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office (Romans 11:13).

He knew he had something to do. The original twelve apostles had some special characteristics. Of those original twelve, each had seen Jesus of Nazareth in person. Each had seen Him after His resurrection. This was not true of Paul who met Jesus of Nazareth in His glorified body while Paul was on the Damascus Road. This may be why Paul spoke of himself as "one born out of due time." Paul did not esteem himself worthy to be called an apostle because of his early opposition to the Gospel. But Paul recognized that he had been called to be an apostle. In writing to Timothy Paul spoke of himself as "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Savior, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope" (I Timothy 1:1). Though he did not esteem himself worthy to be an apostle Paul knew that he had served well for he said in another place, "For in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing" (II Corinthians 12:11).

Being an apostle did not protect Paul from suffering. This is very important for us to recognize. If we have been sent in the Lord's work, and we go in obedience to His command and we seek to serve Him, that is no indication that everything will be sweet and lovely so far as we are concerned. We read "The servant is not greater than his master." The Lord Jesus said this and then pointed out that if they persecuted the Master, they would persecute the servant. Since Jesus of Nazareth had been persecuted unto death, Paul was prepared to expect the same. However, Paul acted to escape violent persecution whenever he could, when danger threatened Paul withdrew. On some occasions he left the city where there was trouble developing. And on one occasion he escaped by being let down over the wall in a basket. But his testimony was full and strong. He was able to write:

Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds (II Corinthians 12:12).

These then are the signs of an apostle.

In other words while the apostle would get his authority from God, he would have his sense of mission from the living God, who would by the Holy Spirit inspire him. So far as his function among people was concerned, the apostle would be recognized among people because of the authoritative words that he spoke. There would be certain evidences, and here they are listed just in so many words. The signs of an apostle – "in all patience," expecting God to do His will and waiting on it, expecting God to work according to His promises and waiting on God to do it. So far as Paul was concerned, he went out and testified and witnessed and shared with people in truth about the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing that it was going to bring persecution upon him. And enduring that persecution without any hesitation he went straightforward, allowing it to happen. The word "patience," when it is used in the New Testament, means

something else than just long suffering. We are inclined to feel oftentimes that we show patience in a particular situation when we are annoyed or irritated and we do not immediately fly off the handle. We say we are being patient. But actually the word "patience" should be used in this way: if we are looking for results, if we are expecting some consequence, we stay right where we are, we continue doing just what we have been doing, and we wait with "patience" for the results that we are expecting.

And what this meant with reference to Paul as an apostle, when he gave forth the Word of God and when he preached and told people what God had done and what God would do, was that he continued with his testimony without changing his mind, without changing his public utterance, until there would be results. "In signs," we do not know too much about that but it would be where he would be involved in accomplishing amazing events. It is hard to say how you and I would recognize such signs today. You might be wondering whether a certain pastor was fulfilling the function of being an apostle. If he was going to be an apostle, the people who are hearing him would need to have the impression in their hearts and minds "this man is from God. This man has been sent from God." And a sign of that evidence would be the effect his ministry would have upon other people. And if you had a pastor who is continuing with his work and in the course of his work people were being blessed, lives were being affected and being changed, those would be signs that the minister actually had the blessing of God. And this would help to build up the impression that you would have that the speaker was actually sent from God.

When Paul performed certain miracles in the course of his work, there were certain things that resulted from his ministry. These were "signs and wonders." – Now signs and wonders would almost be like saying the same thing but it is not exactly the same. Wonders are things that are unexpected, things that are results that you do not look for. And the wonders would be the case of unbelieving men brought to faith, careless women brought close to God, wayward young people brought back to God, that kind of thing. These would be wonders. When you have in mind a man and think there is no use talking to him for more than twenty years he has had his back turned to the Gospel, and he is going away. But this speaker, this witness, gives the message of the Gospel, and that wayward soul turns. That is a wonderful thing. And when there are people turning to God as a consequence of such preaching, you would say that is apostolic preaching. That is the way an apostle does. So the "signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." There were great performances in power.

That such persons are among God's people today is to be understood from the way the New Testament uses the word "apostle." In I Corinthians 12:28 the list of prophets, teachers and apostles are named. In fact the apostles are named first. Apostles, prophets and teachers are gifts to the church. And so the apostles there are linked with prophets and teachers. And then again in Ephesians 4:11 the prophet is listed with evangelists, pastors and teachers, which would mean that he is one of those who is active in spreading the Gospel message.

But the particular idea in the apostle is that he is authoritatively sent from God. The words that he speaks are actually the words God wants said. This does not mean that that man could not do anything else. It does not mean that he could not be a teacher, and it does not mean that he could not be an evangelist, but the word "apostle" brings in the idea that he has a special message from God that he wants to share. And by the way, this same apostle can be an ambassador. He can actually function to work between the soul and God bringing the soul to God in prayer and bringing God to the soul in preaching. This is the general work of an apostle. And when you speak in terms of Paul being an apostle you mean Paul was someone who had been sent by God to carry out the Gospel message to the whole wide world. And this he did in a wonderful fashion.

Chapter 32

The World Of Paul

In this chapter we are going to study about the world in which Paul lived. The name of Paul the Apostle is known throughout the whole wide world. Everybody who has ever heard the Gospel knows about Paul. But the world in which he lived and served was much smaller. It was the world around the Mediterranean Sea. The world in which he was born was the Jewish world, centered in Jerusalem. The world of Paul, taking in the whole Mediterranean world, was dominated by three cultures, the Jewish, the Greek and the Roman. Paul had personal relations in each. He was a Roman citizen, free born because his father was a citizen before him. He was educated in the Greek city of Tarsus, and thus he was acquainted with Greek learning, and could speak the Greek language. He was born a Jew from whence he had his religious views and commitments.

Rome was the political ruler of the whole Mediterranean world. The Romans were the civic rulers. They had the policemen to keep order. They assumed responsibility to keep the peace in all public affairs. They were very liberal in allowing freedom for any religion that any group of people in the Empire wanted to have, but they were sensitive to any threat to their Emperor or to the nation. Greece was the intellectual leader in the Mediterranean world. Any educated person had studied Greek philosophy. Paul had studied in the Greek language in Tarsus, which he described as "no mean city." He was well versed in Greek thought and did not hesitate to warn his converts to "beware lest any spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world." Now that is the way the Greeks would do their thinking, in human ways; very, very clever; very, very brilliant; but very, very human. The Jews were the religious leaders in the Mediterranean world. They had long standing traditions which they cherished about their special relation to God. Among the Jews there were three major schools of thought. The Pharisees who put special emphasis upon the Scriptures as they were written. If we could say it without making any invidious insinuation, they were the conservatives of the day, the orthodox people. They believed in the reality of the spiritual world, they believed in God and in angels and in heaven; and they tried to earn the blessing of God by keeping His commandments. They observed strict rules about fasting and praying and were quick and rigid about condemning anybody who did not agree with them, others who were different. The Sadducees were the modernists of their time. They did not accept the Scriptures, although they were Jews and were counted among the Jews. They voted in the Jewish nation, they counted like they were Jews, but they did not accept the Scriptures as they were written. They interpreted them, they gave their own version of them. They had confidence in human nature.

The Pharisees subscribed to the Bible teaching that man is a sinner, but the Sadducees thought that man is getting better and better. The Sadducees did not believe in the reality of the spiritual world. They did not believe in heaven. They did not believe in life after death. This world was all that mattered and in it man was the deciding factor. The Pharisees and the Sadducees were rival parties. We would today think of them as political parties, although they were in the religious community. With the Jews the matter of religion and the matter of their nationhood was just one thing. Their whole relationship as a nation was in terms of their attitude toward God, their religion.

At the time of Jesus of Nazareth the Sadducees were in the place of power in the temple. They had won the election so to speak, and they were the ones that were in authority. All public services were under the Sadducees. When Jesus of Nazareth was brought in and taken into court the High Priest was a Sadducee, which meant, of course, that the High Priest had no confidence in anything that Jesus of Nazareth would say about God as a person or about heaven or about eternal life. The Sadducees rules those things out. But the Pharisees were the most deadly enemies of Jesus of Nazareth and that was a strange thing. And yet there were Pharisees that became believers. For instance, Paul started out as a Pharisee. And there were Pharisees that actually were converted. But there is no record that I know of in the New Testament of any

Sadducee that ever became a believer. This is far more serious than you think as your first hear about it. Remember what I said, they were what we would call the modernists of the day. They were the people who did not believe the Bible as it was written and they did not believe in the fact that man was a sinner. They did not believe in heaven, they did not believe in angels and so on. I do not know of one single instance where any Sadducee in the New Testament is spoken of as ever becoming a believer in Jesus Christ.

There was a third party known as the Essenes. They were a smaller group who emphasized personal self-denial in conduct. They were very rigid about denying themselves in an ascetic fashion. They lived by strict rules about diet and conduct. But the two larger groups were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. There was also another smaller group among the Jews called or known as the Scribes. They were the scholars of the day. They specialized in knowing the text of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Although Paul was born a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, he was educated and learned in Greek culture, and he was a Roman citizen. But he had contact with all three prevailing cultures at that time. He belonged to the Pharisees and he was exceedingly zealous to maintain and to obey the traditions of his father. The Roman government allowed each national or cultural group in their empire to practice their own religion. In the case of the Jews, the Romans allowed them to have their own laws and their own authority over their own people to control their activities. However, all was carried out under the watchful eye of the Roman government.

Jewish law would assess the death penalty for some crimes of religious nature, for instance, blasphemy against God. Among the Jews, that would bring on the death penalty, but the Romans would not allow it. The only times when they would allow the death penalty was in case of treason against the nation. They would not permit any Jewish court to put anyone to death. The Jews could recommend to the Roman government, but the Romans would have their own application of the law of capital punishment. When we think about all of this and we are thinking in terms of the Jews and we are wondering what that bearing has upon us in our day and time, we might keep in mind how he answered the question when he asked the question himself, "What advantage then hath the Jews?" What difference does it make that one is a Jew? Much, Paul wrote, chiefly because they have the oracles of God. They had the Word of God.

The Jews represented not so much a group of people who were what they were because of their biological background. It was not that one was born into the Jewish family, although that was the way the Jewish people were, but one could join the Jews. One could come into the Jewish family if one were a Gentile and born a Gentile, because the Jews primarily were Jews because of their convictions. If one had the same kind of convictions they had, one could join them even though one had not been a member of the Jews in a biological way. But for ourselves, when we think about messages that were given to Jews in the New Testament we can think in terms of messages today given to people who know the Scriptures. We have today, in any church, some people who know the Bible: the Bible is read in their home, they went to Sunday School as children, and they had learned the Bible stories as children, and so they know something about the Bible. There are other people in the churches, as you know, who know nothing about the Bible. When you read in the New Testament about certain messages sent to the Jews, you can think in terms of messages sent to people who know the Scriptures, and by contrast the same Gospel will be preached to people who know nothing about the Scriptures at all. That would compare to what the Old Testament would speak of as the Gentiles. This, in general, was the description of the world in which Paul lived.

So even in our own day and time among the people who are in our churches we will have some who like the Pharisees will know the Scriptures and believe them; and we will have some people who are like the Sadducees, who know the Scriptures but they do not accept them as they read. They interpret them according to their own understanding. But that was the kind of world in which Paul lived, and in which he bore his witness and testimony to the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 33

Paul As A Jew

The world in which Paul lived included three major cultures, each of which esteemed itself to be the most important. The Jewish culture with its Old Testament Scriptures considered itself superior because the Jews believed they were God's chosen people. They looked forward to a golden future when God's Messiah would come to deliver the Jews from their enemies and to establish the Kingdom of God. Then the whole world would be brought under the rule of the Messiah, who would be a Son of David, and would rule over all the earth. The Greek culture with all its intellectual achievements considered itself superior because all the educated people had been trained in Greek schools. The Roman culture esteemed itself superior because the Romans ruled and overruled with military strength. They were in charge of all affairs and events as they occurred throughout the whole Mediterranean world. Paul had personal contact with each of these, with all three cultures. Because his father was a Roman citizen, Paul was free-born as a Roman citizen. He was educated as a Greek, having grown up in Tarsus which was a Greek city, but he was born of Jewish parents from whom he received the Jewish tradition. He spoke about himself in this way:

Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless (Philippians 3:5-6).

When Paul faced the question, "What advantage then hath the Jew?" he could say, "Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God." So they had the Old Testament Scriptures. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets." Thus being a Jew, Paul's consciousness was oriented toward God. And this brought certain results. What I have in mind by that is simply that so far as Paul's thinking was concerned, God was very important. In fact, He was central in all that Paul had in mind. Paul was not troubled about the world in which he lived. God made the world and God ruled and overruled in it. The Greeks could be smart but God was smarter. The Romans could be in charge but God was the Ruler. Yet God had chosen Abraham and his seed through whom all the world would be blessed. This is the quiet confidence and assurance that a man with Paul's background and training could have. Looking out upon the whole world, resting quietly and peacefully in his heart and mind, Paul knew God was in control. Paul was not troubled about providence, about how things would happen. The ways of God are past finding out, but God doeth all things well.

Paul knew all these things before he ever knew the Gospel. They are all included in the Old Testament teachings. This confidence in God's care for His own was grounded in Old Testament history and biography, and was set forth in the Psalms and in the Proverbs and in Ecclesiastes, all of which Paul would know very well. Paul was not confused about national affairs. He knew that God had permitted Rome to be the seat of secular government. The Romans were Gentiles; and his people, the Jews, were God's chosen people. But God in His wisdom had permitted the Gentiles to hold dominion over his people, the Jews. But that would be just for a time. One day Messiah would come and He would deliver the Jews and set them out over all. So far as the national affairs were concerned, as to what Rome was doing and how they were doing it, those things would not matter much to Paul. Paul was assured of the stability of the society in which he was a member. He did not have any worry about what was going to happen to the Jews. The fortunes of the Jewish people were in the hands of Almighty God. Nobody could disturb what was resting in the hand of God.

Paul personally was established in righteousness. The law of God had been revealed in the Ten Words on Mount Sinai. And the regulations for worship and for the service of God had been set forth in the ritual

and the religious practices that the priest carried on. Paul had been a diligent, obedient worshipper of God. His conscience was clear about the way in which he had dealt with God. When Paul considered himself blameless, Paul does not mean that he never did anything wrong. But it just means that when he did do wrong, he brought in his sacrifice and he made his confession to God and he accepted the forgiveness of God. This was all in the Old Testament, and Paul was a man who was thoroughly versed in it and deeply grounded in it. So far as the future was concerned, that depended upon God. God would carry out His will. God had in mind to bless the Jewish people. He had always blessed them in the past. He would do so in the future. The Jews understood very well that this did not depend upon them being so good. They were not. Their own prophets told them that.

In the case of Moses, Moses had definitely told Israel that God blessed them when they went into the land. You will read it in the book of Deuteronomy. These things were not done because Israel was good, and these things were not done because Israel was strong. They were neither good nor strong. But God favored them. And, by the way, while you are thinking about this you might just have in mind so far as believers in Christ are concerned, all of this is true for them. Because in Christ Jesus we are included in this grace.

Paul was confident about the future and Paul believed in the reality of the spiritual world. Paul believed in God. There was not any question in his mind. He believed in heaven, and that means he believed in hell. He believed there is such a thing as "after death", "it is appointed unto man once to die" and after death the judgment. He believed that in the matter of judgment some would be found acceptable to God and some unacceptable to God. The acceptable people would be kept by God and the unacceptable people would be destroyed. This was something that Paul understood and he believed it. Paul believed in the reality of the devil, the reality of Satan. And Paul believed in the reality of angels and of demons. All of these things he believed because he was a Jew. And you will say, "Well I thought they were in the Gospels." Certainly those things are in the Gospel, but they are not the exact distinctive thing that makes it the Gospel. We will notice about that when we think of Paul as a Christian. But just now we are thinking of Paul as a Jew and he had all of these things in mind.

Paul believed in the resurrection of the dead. There were other Jews who did not, e.g. the Sadducees: These were Jews who thought that all talk about the future and all talk about heaven was just symbolic. All this was Paul's heritage because he was born a Jew. But with it all he also inherited the great national error that the Jews had. The Jews had made a great national mistake. As a Jew, Paul would have included this error in his heritage and would have made the great big mistake of thinking that the way to get right with God was to keep the commandments. He afterwards was going to learn in the Gospel that the way to get right with God is to accept the grace of God by believing in Christ Jesus.

Even though the Jews hated Paul, and persecuted him and tried to kill him, Paul never really in his heart and mind turned against the Jews with whom he had lived and where he was born. Paul writes in the book of Romans:

I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen (Romans 9:1-5).

That is a remarkable statement.

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God (Romans 10:1-3).

Chapter 34

Paul As A Pharisee

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 (Acts 26:4-5).

In the history of Israel difference of opinion as to the meaning of Scripture and as to the validity of certain doctrines resulted in the emergence of several distinct parties, the most popular and the most numerous group was known as the Pharisees. Their most striking doctrine was the authenticity of the Scriptures. They taught that God expected everyone to obey the law, and the law for them had been revealed through the Words that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai. To carry this out, they studied the Scriptures to identify the commandments. They lifted all the commandments found in Scripture and esteemed that virtue was a matter of keeping such regulations.

In their application of these requirements, they fell into all manner of ridiculous rules. When the disciples shelled some wheat to eat out of hand as they walked in the fields, the Pharisees criticized them for harvesting on the Sabbath Day. When the crippled man had been healed and had been told to carry his pallet, his bed, they criticized Jesus of Nazareth for working on the Sabbath Day. With all their meticulous attention to rules and regulations they were notorious as hypocrites. Jesus of Nazareth openly denounced their superficial ethics in morality. I do not think that when we say that they were hypocrites they are to be understood in the ordinary sense in which we use that word, as though they were all necessarily, consciously deceitful in all things, but rather that they made it a point to carry out and play a part. They acted as if things were so and so when they were not, and thus the word "hypocrite" is to be used. This is how the Lord Jesus Himself spoke of these people:

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell (Matthew 23:13-33)?

These very heavy words were spoken by Jesus of Nazareth about the Pharisees. I am sure there would be individual differences among them even as there are in any congregation, there would be exceptions among them, but their general character would prevail.

Being a Pharisee meant that Paul had a high regard for the Scriptures. He would study the Scriptures to

learn the mind of God. Even if he made a wrong interpretation of what the scripture said, he would know the words, the history and the practices of God's people. Being a Pharisee meant that Paul would have definite habits in prayer. The Pharisees believed in prayer and were inclined to want to be seen praying in public. In addition to Bible reading and practicing public prayer, the Pharisees also practiced fasting. It was their custom to fast twice a week. Thus they would go without food that their spiritual sensitivity would be sharper and they would be more disposed to obey God. The Pharisees also gave tithes of all their income. Sometimes the practice of tithing tempted the worshipper to be dishonest. Farmers who wanted to be counted as giving a tenth of their income would on occasion give as their tithe fruit that was overripe or animals that were crippled. Thus we can understand the Pharisees were proud in their feelings of superiority over other men.

In the parable of the two men who went into the temple to pray, the Pharisee felt that he was far more fit to pray than the other.

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted (Luke 18:9-14).

This is the way the Lord put it. As a Pharisee Paul was very religious. He was moral and would be counted as a good man. He certainly believed in God and he went to much trouble to earn the blessing of God. But he was not acceptable to God. Jesus of Nazareth spoke of the Pharisees as being like unto whitened sepulchers, outwardly they were so neat and clean but inwardly they were full of dead men's bones. In the case of Paul he could say that he had lived carefully in obedience to the will of God as he understood it, yet he had been blind to the truth of the Gospel.

I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 26:9).

Paul, as a Pharisee, would have been considered a strong member of any church that you and I know, moral and good. He was a man who worshipped God regularly, who prayed to God several times a day, fasted twice each week and gave tithes of all his income. You know if you had a man like that in the church, you would think you had a very fine church member. And yet in his pride and self-righteousness that man would not be pleasing to God. This is very sobering to us all, and it is something for us all to have in mind. It is important to go to church and it is important to pray and it is important to read the Bible, it is important to give to the Lord's work and to missions. But these things in themselves are not the basis of our acceptance with God. God does not receive me because I come to worship. He does not receive me because I read the Bible, or because I pray, or because I give to missions. He receives me because Christ Jesus died for me. My hope and my trust is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

Chapter 35

Paul On The Damascus Road

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 (Acts 26:4-5).

Paul the Apostle began his life as Saul the Pharisee. He was well educated, he had grown up in Tarsus which was a Greek city in Asia Minor where he had learned the Greek language and became acquainted with the Greek philosophy and scholarship. Also he sat at the feet of Gamaliel who was one of the leading Jewish scholars in that day. He lived a good moral life so that he could recall that in the matter of righteousness that was in the law, he was blameless. This would not necessarily mean that he never did anything wrong. But it did mean that when he felt that he had sinned, he would bring his sacrifice, confess his sin and expect to be forgiven. Paul apparently was interested in matters of religion. When Stephen was brought before the Council to face charges brought against him for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the young man Saul was in the crowd that stoned Stephen to death. There is no record that Saul threw a stone, but the Scriptures do record "and Saul was consenting unto his death." And Paul later revealed this incident and admitted that he had agreed with the crowd in putting Stephen to death.

Saul was zealous in carrying out the judgment of the Jewish leaders that those who spread the message about Jesus of Nazareth should be stopped.

As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison (Acts 8:3).

Here was a man that believed the Old Testament Scriptures, kept a good conscience in his observance of the law as he understood it, who tithed his income and who sought to serve God to the fullest of his capacity, and yet who was wrong. He was dead wrong, all the time. This has such a sharp lesson for any of us today. There may not be many whose life would measure up to Saul's character, but it can commonly happen that many of us can have in mind that the way we are doing would be the way to be right with God, to earn His blessing. We should do right and be right, but all such ideas are wrong. Not only because we would not ever so qualify, but because even if we did, we would still be wrong.

When the Ethiopian floundered in unbelief due to his ignorance, Philip could instruct him about the truth about Jesus of Nazareth, the truth that Isaiah had in mind when he wrote the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. The Ethiopian could believe what Philip told him and be baptized, and go on his way rejoicing. When Cornelius languished in unbelief because of the traditions that separated the Gentiles from the Jews, Peter could come into his house, tell him the Gospel and Cornelius could believe what Peter told him and be baptized with all his household. But when Saul, the young Pharisee, blindly opposed the Gospel in his prejudice, it took an act of God to open his eyes. The story of what happened to Saul on the Damascus Road is well known.

Paul afterward understood that his personal experience had broad significance.

Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting (I Timothy 1:16).

There is no possible way to misunderstand what happened on the Damascus Road.

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. 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? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou

persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: 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 9:1-9).

This event was so significant that it is repeated three times in the short book of Acts.

There are several factors in this record we should note. First, the reality of the spiritual world was revealed. You could not possibly read that story without knowing that there is an invisible world. Apart from the things that you can see in this world, there is the actual presence of God. In the second place, Jesus Christ is alive. He is in command. We see Him here actually dealing with Saul the Pharisee. In the third place, the first great truth was the person of Jesus Christ. "Who art thou, Lord" That is the first thing that Saul had to get straight in his mind. And he was told very simply, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." Just that very person. And finally, in the fourth place, there was a second truth brought out, the commitment of the believer. "What wilt thou have me to do?" So in one single blinding flash Saul the Pharisee became Paul the Apostle.

We should note something: he was not serving himself in any way. That is one of the tragedies of sincere honest people. They can be wrong and sometimes I think that probably nobody is so stubborn and probably nobody is so set in his ways as the person who knows inwardly that he has personal integrity, that he needs to be honest and he wants to go straightforward and do the right thing, and then is on the wrong track. A man like that is hard to turn around. You see, if a person actually feels that his manner of life is not any good, that he does things that are wrong, that he has some habits he follows, then he does not have any doubt in his mind at all that he is a sinner. That kind of person, in a certain sense, is easy enough to talk to. If you can get his attention, he is already half-way over on your side because he really thinks he is wrong. But the person who feels deep down in his heart that he is honest and sincere, such a person as that finds it very hard to accept the idea that he is wrong when actually he is so sincere in what he is doing.

All of this is pictured to us so clearly in the experience of Saul the Pharisee, the young, honest, earnest, zealous man seeking to serve God, really thinking he was doing God a service, in pursuing all those people who believed in Jesus of Nazareth. That this same young man came to know that Jesus Christ was alive and that He actually was the Messiah, this was a tremendous thing. It happened not by long arguments, not by something carefully set out by planning it for him; it happened by the simple truth that was revealed in that blinding flash. Jesus Christ is alive and in the presence of God and is interested in what is going on down here and actually wants to save people. This is the great truth that comes to us when we are thinking about Paul on the Damascus Road.

Chapter 36

Paul As A New Convert

And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus (Acts 9:8).

In our last study we saw how Saul the Pharisee was stopped in his tracks while on the road to Damascus by the living Lord Jesus Christ. In that flash of light Saul was not only struck down prostrate, but he was blinded for three days. There could be no doubt in Saul's mind about the authentic nature of this event. I mean to say Saul knew something had happened. For three days he was blind and did not eat nor drink. It would baffle any attempt to imagine what Paul was thinking in those three days. He had been wrong. And he had been so sure he was right. Jesus of Nazareth whom he had despised and opposed was truly the Son of God! What a shocking thing this would be to Saul's heart and mind! And now God was going to call him to a life of service in the name of Jesus Christ.

And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God (Acts 9:20).

We need to keep in mind that whereas Saul's course of action was completely converted, the direction of his faith was not really changed. He simply saw further, more clearly, the true meaning of what he had always believed. As a Jew and especially as a Pharisee, he believed in the reality of God, in the reality of heaven, in the reality of the soul, in the reality of the resurrection. These are things that Saul the Pharisee believed. He understood that God would forgive sin on the basis of shed blood, of the sacrifice. He believed the promise about the Messiah and he looked forward to the eternal kingdom of God. None of these convictions needed to be changed. At this point Saul needed his conception of Jesus of Nazareth to be changed. His personal encounter with the living Lord Jesus Christ was shattering to his whole frame of mind. The veil was taken from his heart and he saw that Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, was Christ, the Christ of God. This required no further elaboration. He immediately began to preach Christ in the synagogue.

The first great truth was immediately clear, Jesus of Nazareth was Christ, to the glory of God the Father. This Saul could preach at once and this he did. My father-in-law was born a Jew, and was being educated to be a Rabbi. Just before completing his training, he became a believer in Christ Jesus. When his eyes were opened, and the veil over his heart was taken away, so that he could believe that Jesus of Nazareth was truly the Messiah, the one expected to come to deliver the Jews, my father-in-law immediately confronted his fellow Jews and his instructors with his testimony that Jesus was the Christ. And to his shock and amazement they would not believe and they cast him out as a renegade. Saul continued to preach Christ in the synagogues of Damascus. We read:

But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ (Acts 9:22).

We can almost understand how Saul would become more and more convincing in his presentation of the truth about Jesus as the Christ. And it seems almost natural to read "And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him" (Acts 9:23)

Now we see that Saul was practical as well as enthusiastic. He had personal faith in God but that did not prompt him to be careless or foolhardy. He knew the hatred of the Jews was a real threat, even though he knew about the reality of the spiritual world and had personal experience with the living Lord, he did not presume to expect any miracle to save his life. He took precaution to avoid those who wanted to kill him. And so we read this rather astonishing report:

Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket (Acts 9:25).

That was the way he escaped. This was not at all an evidence of cowardice on Saul's part. It was an example of good judgment. There is much to learn in this description of the new convert's conduct.

No doubt Saul was befriended by believers in Damascus but he found that his old reputation created problems as he moved about in the Mediterranean world. He had become notorious as an enemy of the Gospel and as a persecutor of believers. Wherever he went, believers shrank away in fear. It was so in Jerusalem. Here he was befriended by Barnabas.

Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way . . . (Acts 9:27).

Barnabas evidently had heard Saul's testimony and had understood how genuine his experience had been. We will be watching this man Barnabas, how he did this in several different ways. Here we find he befriended Saul. Later on we are going to find that he befriended his nephew John Mark, and actually separated from Paul on that account.

Eventually the brethren brought him to Caesarea to save his life and finally to Tarsus where he spent about three years. We hear how Saul who had been such a zealous, active young man following out his convictions as a Pharisee now is taken back into the desert in Arabia. And so far as we can make out from what we read in the New Testament, it appears that Saul spent about three years there. Many of us have tried to understand this in connection with all that happened and we realize it takes time to actually grow into the understanding of the Gospel. Of course, the first big thing is to know that Jesus is the Christ and this Saul found out on the Damascus Road. Then he personally gave his witness to faith in Christ and told the whole world what he believed. He actually argued the matter and many people believed on Christ because of his preaching. But he still did not understand everything that was involved. He did not understand all the blessing that was coming to him because he was a believer in Christ. Apparently, this is what grew in his heart and mind in those three years that he spent in the desert in Arabia.

Barnabas called him from there to come to Antioch where he was able to help in teaching the new converts the things of the Gospel. So we find that Paul, as a new convert, had another exciting and impressive experience. He actually took it on himself to tell everybody he met that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, the Son of the living God. And he preached it in the synagogues, going right to the very center of his old religion. You see, in his so doing he would not have any idea that he was contradicting those people. He wanted simply to help them to understand more of the truth. And that is the way it is with many of us today. We have people who believe in a general way in the Christian Gospel. They believe in the church. They are in favor of what the church is doing. They are in favor of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. When they hear about some person who had been addicted to drink, some alcoholic who has been saved through faith in Christ Jesus and they hear about someone who had been given over to drugs and then was delivered through Christ Jesus, their hearts respond. They think that is fine, but when it comes to accepting Jesus Christ in their own personal experience, in their own heart, there are many people who need time to fully appreciate the significance of what it means to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Every now and again we should thank God. We should lift up our face and thank God. We should thank God for our health. We should thank God for strength. Are we able to get around and go about our work? Well, we should thank God. Many people cannot do it. We should thank God for keeping us even if we are sick. And if we have been through an illness, was there any turn in there at all when you felt that God was with you? Well, thank Him. And we should thank Him for our homes. It is a wonderful thing we have that place and we have those loved ones of ours. We should thank God for our country. This is a great country we are living in. Let us thank God. We appreciate it. We should thank God for our church. I know a great many people criticize the church about a great many things; you and I cannot afford to keep quiet about that. Certainly the church may not be perfect but the church has been wonderful in the

blessings we have received. We should thank God for our friends and thank God for the way we get along. Even when we have troubles, thank the Lord, praise the Lord, that is the way to qualify for more blessing.

Chapter 37

Paul and Barnabas

Believers in Christ Jesus do not live, nor walk, nor pray, nor serve alone.

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

This brings a very interesting truth to our attention. I know that there is blessing in a private relationship with the Lord. I realize that in prayer you are to enter into your closet, shut the door and when you are alone in secret you can talk to God. But there are blessings that are associated with fellowship. It is where two or three are gathered together. Believers are not only fellow servants in a common service, but they are actually members one of another. They belong one to the other. There is to be no schism in the body. Differences between members should never come out to separation.

Believers are all members of the one body of Christ. But in their individual performances these members may differ as in our own body the eye, the ear, the nose, the hand, the foot, all have different functions. In a similar way, so far as members of the body of Christ are concerned, their understanding of what should be done may differ. Just because two believers are consciously, sincerely dedicated to do God's will does not mean that they will agree as to what to do or how to do it. Each one is personally responsible to the Lord for his own conduct. Paul is widely known and appreciated wherever the Gospel is preached. Barnabas is known mainly in the book of Acts. He was a believer in Christ in the first days of the Early Church. The first mention of this man notes an act of personal self-sacrifice. In the book of Acts, in chapter 4, for instance, we read:

And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:36-37).

This is Barnabas.

The next occasion when we read of Barnabas was after Saul had become a believer on the Damascus Road, and was forced to flee from Damascus to save his life. But when Saul came to Jerusalem the disciples in Jerusalem were afraid to receive him as one of themselves. They feared him because of his notorious reputation as a persecutor of the believers. It was then that Barnabas took a hand. And so we read again in Acts:

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).

It was Barnabas who sponsored Saul when he came to join the believers in Jerusalem. The disciples fled from Jerusalem after the death of Stephen. And we read in Acts:

Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. 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. 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. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek 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. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch (Acts 11:19-26).

Here again it was Barnabas who sponsored Saul as teacher of the new converts who were Gentiles. When the young church at Antioch sent money to Jerusalem to the relief of the believers who were in want, they sent the money in the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

When Barnabas and Saul were thus at Jerusalem the Holy Spirit called them to go as missionaries.

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).

It is interesting that in that list Barnabas is named first and Saul at the very last of the group.

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them (Acts 13:2).

So Barnabas and Saul had been selected by the Holy Spirit Himself to go as missionaries. On their missionary journey Saul's name was changed to Paul. He became the more prominent leader in the party. He confronted the sorcerer, Elymas, announcing that Elymas would be struck blind which happened to the astonishment of all who saw it. When they came to Antioch in Pisidia, Paul stood up in the synagogue and showed how the history of God's dealing with Israel had moved toward the coming of the Messiah, the Christ, and then affirmed that Jesus of Nazareth whom the rulers in Jerusalem had condemned to death was actually Christ. Paul said that God raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead and that now "through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." The effect of such preaching was great, arousing envy and opposition among the Jews but was greatly appreciated by the Gentiles.

Contention became so sharp in Antioch in Pisidia that the Jews raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them out of their coast. So the missionary party came to Iconium where "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." Here again opposition developed which threatened violence. So they fled to Lystra and Derbe, and there they preached the Gospel. When Paul healed a cripple the people were profoundly impressed and cried out that "The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men." The priest of Jupiter actually led in a demonstration to worship Barnabas and Paul. We read:

And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker (Acts 14:12).

Barnabas and Paul hurriedly humbled themselves before the people.

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 . . . And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them (Acts 14:15-18).

In the course of the missionary journey, many Gentiles had come to faith in Christ. Now a new problem arose. Some of the church felt that the Gentile converts should first be circumcised according to the Jewish tradition before they should be received into the church. Paul and Barnabas stoutly maintained that God had accepted the Gentiles as they were when they believed. The problem was referred to the first church Council (Acts 15) who sustained Paul and Barnabas. When they were planning another missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to take Mark along, but Paul did not want to do this because Mark had left them while they were on the first trip. The contention was so sharp between them that they departed asunder one from the other. Many have wondered how it could happen that two servants of God could ever have such an honest difference of opinion to the point that they would separate and each go his own way. However, this does not imply anything wrong. Actually, it is an indication of the limitation of human understanding. The result in this case was that there were two missionary parties instead of one. There is no further report as to whether Barnabas and Paul were ever together again. But throughout all that we have been quickly reviewing here in connection with Barnabas, we are conscious of the fact that he was

a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and full of faith, that he actually had sponsored others. We found him sponsoring Saul when he was just a new convert and when the people were afraid of Saul and wanted to turn away from him. And we found him here at the time of their separation sponsoring Mark and wanting to bring him back into the ministry. This was a good man and blessed of God.

Chapter 38

Paul As A Missionary

The Apostle Paul is a pattern for believers in Christ in their spiritual experience and service. His experience in coming to faith on the Damascus Road was classic. What happened to him is an excellent description of what is involved when any soul comes to Christ. In a similar way the record of his service as a missionary is classic for all missionaries of the Gospel. What is reported so plainly in the case of Paul is a pattern of what happens with every missionary. We can note aspects of Paul's ministry to learn what to expect if we want to serve the Lord. And, by the way, this thing of being a missionary does not mean it is necessary to go to Africa or to China. You can be a missionary right here in this country.

There is a very real sense in which every parent is a missionary to the children. Every mother is a missionary to her child. And about this whole matter of thinking of Paul as a missionary, there are several things that we could note. In the first place, at the very beginning, Paul had personal dealings with the living Lord. That seems to be so basic. Paul was commissioned by the living Lord to go and to tell the Gospel truth. He did not go as a result of his understanding of the needs of men. He did not go because he felt the ethics and the morals of believers in Christ were superior and could be taught to help other people to better living. He did not go because he was imitating any great leader or preacher. He had personally met the living Jesus as Lord, and the Lord had told him to go. It was just as simple as that. And it is just as basic as that today with us.

Following Damascus, after Saul had met the Lord on the road, the Lord told Paul what to do.

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 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. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance (Acts 26:15-20).

That is the way Paul describes what he had been told, and this is very important. Later when Paul was persecuted, stoned, and left for dead, he could always remember it was the Lord who assigned him this mission, and it was the Lord who would bring him through it all.

In the second place, Paul was set aside by the church. We have noticed that Paul had received a personal commission from the living Lord to be the Lord's witness and messenger to the Gentiles. But Paul did not immediately commence his missionary service on his own. He was brought into a teaching ministry at Antioch by Barnabas. Then he was named by the Holy Spirit to the church as one of two missionaries.

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. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus (Acts 13:1-4).

That is the way the story goes. This is not a matter of the church thinking that Barnabas and Saul were two capable ministers who would make very good representatives going to the world outside. It was not a matter of what the church thought. The Lord Himself named Barnabas and Saul to this mission and named them to the church. Saul would always have in mind that it was the Lord Himself who named him and moved the church to send him.

In the third place, Paul went as a missionary in a two-fold capacity. He went as the servant of Jesus

Christ, personally called and personally sent. But he also went as a representative of the church. It was Paul's custom to return to the church at Antioch and report what had happened to him, and what the Lord had done through him, because the church had a very real, vital relationship with Paul in the ministry that he had. Although his own personal relationship with Christ Jesus was his own unique experience, Paul considered his public ministry to be a part of the witness of the church.

In the fourth place, when Paul and Barnabas became involved in controversy about accepting Gentile believers into the church fellowship without their being circumcised, Paul did not settle this problem according to his own understanding. He understood the issue very well, and he wrote the book of Galatians setting forth a full argument about this. But now he and Barnabas went to the first general Council of the church in Jerusalem, and humbly presented their argument out of their experience on the field to gain the approval of the church for their procedure. This is a very important aspect of the whole missionary procedure. Paul never thought of missions as he followed through on it, as being his own personal affair. He knew that he was directly responsible to the Lord, but he also was responsible to his fellow believers. His manner was so wise in his humility before the Council that the pioneer leaders of the church, Peter and James, endorsed his views, with the result that the church as a whole adopted Paul's procedure as valid to deal with that problem.

Then again, in the fifth place, we notice that Paul was not only a tireless worker who went on several missionary journeys in the Mediterranean world, but he continued with personal interest to follow the spiritual fortunes of his converts. He described his own ministry thus:

Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labors 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 fasting 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).

That is the way Paul carried on his ministry.

In the sixth place we can have in mind that Paul on occasion exercised his faith in doing miracles. Thus when he was being hindered by Elymas, the sorcerer, he caused the sorcerer to be stricken blind with real results in those who saw it. Then again when he was in Philippi, in Macedonia, he cast out an evil spirit from a young girl. In each of these cases the open demonstration of faith was followed by severe persecution in opposition by the pagans. This is a most interesting thing. Paul would on occasion exercise his faith in a demonstration that would be striking and remarkable. And you would think that would boost him in the esteem of people. It would follow inevitably by severe persecution and very, very rough handling received from his opponents. Paul never employed his faith to secure any miraculous deliverance for himself.

I can remember when I first used to read these things I used to wonder to myself why did not Paul call on God to do something with these people? Why did not he call on God to strike them down, and even cause their arms to be paralyzed if they undertook to hit him? But Paul did not do that. In the last place I would point out that Paul went on his missionary travels as led by the Lord, but he did not always know where he would be led next. He did not plan his own itinerary. He often realized that whereas his own wishes were quite real to him, and he wanted sometimes to go here or go there, but he was free to go only where the Lord led.

Chapter 39

Paul As A Preacher

The Apostle Paul can be taken as the classic example of the believer in Christ. Not only was his experience in coming to faith an example for all conversions, but in his public ministry as a preacher, there is much to be noted and to be learned by any preacher. In the first place we can see how he was prepared in providence. We rejoice to remember that God can use anyone to be His messenger, but we should also note that God prepares the servant who is to serve in a special way. It has been noted that there were three major cultures prevailing in the world in Paul's time, Jewish, Roman and Greek. And Paul was definitely related to each. Because his father was a Roman citizen, Paul was free born as a citizen of Rome. He was brought up and educated in Tarsus, a Greek city, and so he was acquainted with Greek learning. In his own learning Paul had sat at the feet of Gamaliel, a renowned scholar among the Jews. We are reminded that Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and that Daniel was learned in all the knowledge of the Babylonians. So Paul was going to preach the Gospel of God which he received personally from the living Lord. It is noteworthy that he was fully conversant, and acquainted with all the wisdom of the world in which he lived and in which he preached.

In addition to his learning, Paul had a personal encounter with the living Lord Jesus Christ in such a graphic fashion that it affected his consciousness in a basic, vital fashion. Paul had no doubt that God had personally called him and sent him to preach to the Gentiles. He tells about this when he is in court before Agrippa.

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, 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. 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 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. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance (Acts 26:13-20).

That is the way Paul described it.

Paul did not preach because of his own insight, his own understanding, or his own personal conclusion. It was not that Paul was such a student of human nature or of society, that he was so smart that he just started out to preach to help everybody. He preached because he had been sent by God, and he preached what God had revealed to him.

In the second place, Paul was accepted by other believers. Despite his personal call by the living Lord, Paul did not enter into his ministry as a preacher on his own initiative. His own sense of mission was confirmed by the word of Ananias who came to pray over him as we read in Acts:

But the Lord said unto him, (that is Ananias), Go thy way: 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 show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. And 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 there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God (Acts 9:15-20).

When Paul left Damascus and came to Jerusalem, he was sponsored by Barnabas so that the brethren would receive him.

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. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him (Acts 9:27-29).

Later after Paul had spent some three years in Arabia, it was Barnabas again that brought Paul into his first teaching ministry at Antioch.

Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus for to seek 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. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch (Acts 11:25-26).

The fact that the brethren received him is very important even today. A preacher of the Gospel must indeed be called in his own soul by the living Lord to be a witness for Christ, but he must also be accepted by some group of believers who will authorize him to teach and to preach the Gospel in the name of the church.

In the third place, Paul was directed by the Holy Spirit. Although Paul had been called to be a witness by the Lord Himself, and had been endorsed by responsible believers to be a teacher of the Gospel, he was also directed in his actual performance by the direct leading of the Holy Spirit.

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus (Acts 13:2-4).

I am bringing this out to show several different aspects from which Paul was commissioned to his work. God called him, the church endorsed him, and the Holy Spirit led him.

Thus Paul began his great missionary career under the specific guidance of the Holy Spirit in the church. Later while engaged in his missionary activity, Paul was guided in his journeying by the direct intervention of the Holy Spirit. We read in Acts 16 when Paul did not know which part of the country to go into, that he was led by a vision which he had, in which he was led to go into Macedonia. It seems so obvious that the living God had His direct hand in shaping and directing the activities of Paul as a preacher.

Paul was practical in his procedures. He demonstrated in his own ministry that a preacher should set forth his Gospel as meat being served in due season. In Acts 13 Paul preached to the Jews in the synagogue in Antioch and Pisidia. The record of the message shows that Paul used the Scriptures of the Old Testament to argue his point about Jesus being Christ. However, in the very next chapter, in Acts 14 when he preached to the people at Lystra, he used no Scripture. Those people did not know the Old Testament Scripture, so he argued from nature. To enforce to the Greeks, again he used no Scripture but referred to the pagan religious practices and even quoted one of the Greek poets. In each instance he spoke in the vernacular to bring his message to the hearts of his listeners.

Paul was tireless in his zeal. He set no limits in the amount of work he undertook to do. Paul was abused by his opposition. At no time did Paul shrink from accepting whatever men would do to him. When possible to avoid being killed he would avoid open confrontation, but when his opposition laid hands on him, he endured. He would not let the threat of personal violence hinder him. Finally, we see in the Scriptures how Paul was strengthened in his preaching directly by the living Lord. Paul had the experience of finding himself forsaken by other persons but never forsaken by the Lord.

At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood by me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (II Timothy 4:16-18).

This the way the Apostle Paul served as a preacher.

Chapter 40

Paul As A Pastor

The Gospel reveals God's work in salvation as the saving of souls. This begins by Christ Jesus dying for our sins, reconciling us to God, regenerating us in Christ by the new birth, giving us the Holy Spirit, ministering to us in our spiritual growth by His gifts to the body of Christ. All of this is done for us by the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Ephesians 4:11-16).

This is a long statement but it indicates that God arranged for the believers that they should have help in their spiritual growth.

One truth becomes increasingly clear. As a believer I belong to all other believers and all other believers belong to me. There will be persons in other denominations who are nearer to me than fellow members in my own congregation. This relationship with other believers is not only a blessing, it is the communion that I share so that I believe more confidently and serve more effectively. But it also provides help and comfort to me in my own spiritual life. When I became a believer in Christ Jesus, I was a babe. As such I needed the care and the guidance that a child receives from parents. In God's design for human beings, each person lives by interacting with his environment. Since the world has in it both fatal and vital factors, it is necessary that the individual exercise selection of the vital and avoidance of the fatal. Such selection can be made when there is knowledge which the babe does not have. So the parent or someone acting as a parent must help. This is the pattern of the situation that involves the believer. The new believer in Christ needs help from other believers who know what selection to make.

To some believers it is given a special ability to help others, in a special way. Such persons are the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers and they in turn are called gifts to the body of Christ. Pastors have a special function similar to that of a shepherd. They are generally called elders in the New Testament, which word indicates they are mature members, recognized as leaders. Sometimes they are called bishops which word means they are overseers with the functions of watching over the spiritual welfare of the flock. Peter admonishes such in these words:

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away (I Peter 5:1-4).

Here we see listed the several characteristics of a pastor. In the first place he is to be a witness of the sufferings of Christ. Now for those of us who are living now, in this day and time, it is not given to us to have the privilege of seeing the living Lord Jesus Christ die on the cross. But we can read about it and the Holy Spirit can bring those things vital to our heart. But what this points out is that the elder is to be a man who has actually looked upon and thought into and studied the sufferings of Christ.

In the second place, he is a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. The elder can expect the blessing of God upon him. In the third place, he is to be feeding the flock of God. It is in his hands and his responsibility to see to it that the other believers get to know more and more of the Word of God. In the

fourth place, he takes oversight of the flock in a willing, voluntary fashion as when one man actually assumes the responsibility of helping another believer, a younger believer, to come closer and closer to the Lord. And finally in the fifth place, he is to be an example to the flock.

I have listed these in this way because I wanted to point out that the Apostle Paul demonstrated each of these traits, His first preaching done in Damascus was to show that Jesus was the Christ and as he preached, he preached about the Lord Jesus Christ in His suffering, in His death, and in His resurrection. In the second place, he enforced his verbal testimony by patience, and power in prayer. In the third place, he wrote epistles to expound the word and strengthen the faith of the believers. And in the fourth place, he noted the conduct of his parishioners.

A notable example of Paul charging the Corinthian church to discipline a sinning member is instructive to us.

And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (I Corinthians 5:2-5).

These are stern words but this is what the apostle wrote to that church.

Apparently the congregation followed Paul's guidance for he wrote in his second epistle that the congregation should follow up their action of discipline by actively demonstrating love and forgiveness that the man might not be utterly discouraged. All this indicates a deep concern for the eternal welfare of his parishioners. When he referred to the sufferings that he endured as a witness for Christ and as a servant of the Lord, Paul referred to his faithful concern for the welfare of the churches that he had served. And so we read these words: "Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches" (II Corinthians 11:28), meaning to say that the apostle every day was concerned about the congregation that he had left behind when he travelled from place to place.

The second epistle to the Corinthians is usually considered as revealing in the most clear fashion the heartfelt experience of a pastor among his people. Because of local circumstances, Paul apparently served the church in Corinth without taking any regular pay. There was no regular stipend. He supported himself by working with his hands as a tentmaker. Because of this he was maligned by men who questioned his authority as an apostle. They pointed out that because he was doing it for nothing he was not worth much. But Paul did not yield in the face of such criticism. He actually wrote in his defense because he did not want his parishioners to be led away from the true Gospel. And so we read in II Corinthians:

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him. For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles. But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge; but we have been thoroughly made manifest among you in all things. Have I committed an offense in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely? I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service (II Corinthians 11:2-8)

In this way the apostle pointed out to these people that he had spent himself and all that he had, and the money that he could get from other people, that he might be able to serve them. This is the heart and this is the action of a man who is a pastor of God's people.

Chapter 41

Paul As A Teacher

The whole world knows that the marching orders for the church of Jesus Christ is what we call the Great Commission, the last verses in the Gospel of Matthew.

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, 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 always, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matthew 28:18-20).

On another occasion, the Lord Jesus on the evening of the day when He was raised from the dead said to His disciples, "Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." Believers in Jesus Christ as Lord are to be active in the world today doing a continuation of what Jesus Christ came into the world to do.

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel (Mark 1:14-15).

Luke reports that Jesus of Nazareth said "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

The well known parable of the lost sheep is a clear presentation of the work that Jesus Christ came to do.

What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing (Luke 15:4-5)

In these words we see what the shepherd does about the lost sheep. This is exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ does about the lost soul. How then does the shepherd deal with the sheep which he has found? He carries it home. He brings the new found soul to His Father. I think this is one of the hardest things for a believer to accept. You know when I first turned to the Lord Jesus Christ, when I first turned to God and yielded myself to Him, I could expect that He would somehow or other discipline me, that He would chasten me. I would be inclined to think it would be as though that shepherd, when he found the sheep, had himself a switch from the nearest shrub and then got behind that little sheep and would keep hitting it on its legs and giving it to understand that it is to stay home. But there is no picture like that here at all. The picture is that the shepherd came to that lost sheep and picked it up, and laid it on his own shoulder, and carried it home.

I went over that the second time because you know that is exactly what I am trusting and what I am expecting the Lord Jesus Christ to do with me. Although this is pictured in the physical, dramatic way where the shepherd is personally burdened with the sheep on his shoulder, the actual performance of this very act was done by the faith of Jesus Christ in praying to His Father and in the teaching of Jesus Christ as He showed His disciples what God wanted to have done.

We learn something more specific about this when Jesus of Nazareth sent out His disciples.

And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease (Matthew 10:1).

Teaching begins by actually bringing the soul to God. The writer of the book of Acts had written beforehand of all that Jesus began both to do and teach. It is also implied in what Nicodemus said of Jesus of Nazareth.

Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him (John 3:2).

Apparently it was the works that the teacher performed that actually testified that He was the Son of God, and thus authorized to reveal and to interpret the promises of God.

And came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power (Luke 4:31-32).

Hold that for a moment. He did not just give them information. In His teaching, in His presenting the truth, people were actually changed. Again and again the record showed that Jesus of Nazareth grounded the authenticity of His Word upon the demonstration of the power that He manifested.

But that ye may know the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God (Luke 5:24-25).

Some might think that such a demonstration of power was limited to the Lord Jesus, but the call of Paul the Apostle shows the truth about this whole matter.

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 the way Paul put it. Later in his career, Paul described his own function to the Corinthian church in words like this:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; and having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled (II Corinthians 10:3-6).

That is the way it is put. I know that is a heavy sentence and you can read it through slowly, but it is obvious that as a teacher Paul did much more than impart information. He did share information but he also demonstrated power.

We commonly think of the Holy Spirit as our Teacher since the Lord Jesus Himself revealed this when He said "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me." And again these words: "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak for himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." This is the way the Scripture in the New Testament reveals the function of teaching.

We can learn much from noting what was true about Paul as a teacher. We can notice his preparation. He had been born a Jew. Because he was born a Jew and brought up in a Jewish home, he knew the reality of God in the Old Testament tradition. Then he was reared a Pharisee in which he esteemed the Scriptures to be the Word of God, and religious discipline to be the will of God. And he was also a believer in Christ before he ever started to teach. He had met the Lord personally. He knew the living Lord. That is quite a preparation for a person who is going to teach. Then we can notice his call. At the time of his conversion

he was to be a witness in Antioch. He was called by Barnabas to teach the Gentiles who had just become believers and in Jerusalem he was called by the Holy Spirit through the church to go as a missionary.

Paul in his procedure deliberately chose to speak simply, almost naively.

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God (I Corinthians 2:1-5).

That is the way he chose to speak and he was definitely not what you would call a sophisticated teacher. He realized that this was risky. He could be misunderstood. But he exercised his personal faith that his hearers might know the truth.

Chapter 42

Paul As An Apostle

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God" (Romans 1:1). This is Paul's own description of himself. We have no word in our language that will adequately translate that word "servant" when he said he was "a servant of Jesus Christ," as used here by Paul. We say "bond- slave." In the slavery as it was practiced in those days in Palestine and the eastern world, it was not uncommon for slaves to be set free. Sometimes they could work and earn their freedom and sometimes the master would in his kindness and in his benevolence toward his servants actually set him free. But there were persons who, when the master wanted to set them free, would come back to him and ask him to mark them as slaves permanently. Actually he would bore a hole in their ear, perforate it, so to speak, which was a sign that that person was a slave forever and would never be set free. Then he was a "bondslave." It was a voluntary action. This is how Paul esteemed himself.

First of all, before all else he was a permanent slave of Jesus Christ by his own choice. "Called to be an apostle." This was not Paul's own idea. He esteemed himself not worthy to be an apostle since he had at one time persecuted the church, the body of Christ. Even when he admitted that God had called him, he said of himself that he was the least of the apostles. But Paul never belittled the significance of his ministry as seen in the amount of work which he did. On occasion he even compared his work to that of others who claimed to be apostles also and he challenged believers to accept him as an apostle because of the volume of his work and activity. Even though he was not imposing in either personal appearance or in his style of procedure, Paul's critics said about him "His bodily presence is weak and his speech is contemptible." When they said that his speech was contemptible they meant to say that he used small words, common words and because of this people belittled him. But this did not mean that he was stupid.

When he was defending himself in court he was so impressive that he was accused of being unbalanced because of his education, his erudition.

And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad (Acts 26:24).

That was the impression he made on those people. As a matter of fact, the Scripture tells us that Paul's simple, unaffected unsophisticated manner was actually chosen deliberately for spiritual reasons.

And I, brethren, when I came to you, 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. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God (I Corinthians 2:1-5).

I remember so well one time when I was preparing a message and I had developed a certain line of thought that I thought was really going to be impressive. I shared it with my wife. I asked her for her opinion about it. I went through the line of argument and when I was through I wanted to know what she thought of it. She simply said, "It is too much of you." I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "It is too elaborate. People will begin to think that you are smart and you are somebody." And suddenly I realized I should have been telling it in a way that would make you think about God. Paul did not want anyone to be impressed with him, but with the power of God.

In considering Paul's fitness to be an apostle, probably the most significant thing is that he personally knew the Lord. I can remember years ago hearing of an incident when someone came to Thomas Carlisle. It was a young man who had just been called to be the pastor of the church where Thomas Carlisle, the great Scottish philosopher, went to church. This young minister came to visit the old philosopher and he asked him, "Mr. Carlisle, how could a young minister coming into this church serve this people best?"

What are the people looking for?" Carlisle answered him, "The people would like to listen to a man who knew first-hand the things of God."

From his family background and his training as a Pharisee, Paul knew the Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah, God's chosen Servant, who would deliver Israel, the people of God, from their enemies. This was all true; all that was in the Old Testament was true, and this was ingrained in Paul's heart and mind. Then came the blinding moment on the Damascus Road. Suddenly Paul was confronted by a living Person under shattering circumstances. This person talked to him, said He was Jesus of Nazareth who had been killed, and whose empty grave was a sensation in Jerusalem. Then He told Saul that he, Saul, would be told what to do in order that he, Saul, should be a witness to all the world that Jesus of Nazareth was alive.

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? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do (Acts 9:3-6).

Now later the Apostle Paul described this incident.

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 26:17-18).

All of that was given to Paul to do.

The record shows that Paul served the Lord with zeal. We can read the many things that Paul did when other men challenged Paul's authenticity as an apostle. When they questioned whether he was an apostle, Paul spoke out boldly to show that by comparison he was pre-eminently qualified to be recognized as an apostle. As he concluded his personal testimony he could say, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." This is very revealing to us. The marks of an apostle were not humanly noticeable as great in the minds of men, grand in the appearance of human beings, or impressive in any public way. In patience, in signs, his word was significant, in wonders, as he went on about his work things happened and mighty deeds were done. These were the signs of an apostle.

Christ Jesus came into the world to be King of Kings but He came as a babe. He was laid in a manger. It can be seen immediately that a humble stance on the part of an apostle would be just what we should expect. But though Paul was humble, he was by no means weak or retiring. When he was wrongfully put into jail, he insisted that the man responsible for arresting him should personally come to release him, as we read him saying, "But let them come themselves and fetch us out." He was practical in dealing with any situation that he faced. When he faced the Jewish Council in Jerusalem he noted that the Council included both Pharisees and Sadducees. When it looked as though he would be condemned as a trouble-maker, in his defense Paul mentioned that he was a Pharisee and that he had been arrested for preaching the resurrection. This is the very thing the Pharisees believed and the very thing the Sadducees questioned. This doctrine was bitterly contested by the Sadducees. As a result of his referring to it, the Council got into an argument and could not agree on a judgment against Paul.

And one would have to say that Paul acted very wisely. When he was about to be beaten by the soldiers he mentioned that he was a Roman citizen so he could not be beaten until proven guilty. When the soldiers were about to put him in jail because the Greeks felt he was contrary to their religion, Paul spoke Greek which was a surprise to the captain in charge. When he was in the company of believers, he did not hesitate to differ with anyone who failed to act in line with the true doctrine. Thus we read in Galatians "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed"

(Galatians 2:11). And yet when he came to Jerusalem and was told that many of the Jewish believers were disturbed because it had been reported that he had spoken against tradition, against the customs of Moses, he entered into a vow in the Jewish fashion and shaved his head according to the traditional custom. Paul wanted to get along with people because he wanted to spread the Gospel. He took Timothy, whose mother was a Jewess, and had him circumcised because of the Jews. But when Titus, who was a Greek, came to work for him, Paul would not allow Titus to be circumcised because as a Greek it was not in line for that to happen. All of this will indicate to us that the Apostle Paul served as an apostle with great integrity. He put himself into it, altogether, and has left a standard for us, an example for us, to look to and thank God for.

Chapter 43

Paul As A Witness

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 Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

These words are commonly taken to refer to all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel is not something thought up by clean, good men for the benefit of mankind. It is primarily a report to the world of the works of God. God's will is set before men in the form of His promises in which man is told what God will do. Since God is invisible, it is difficult if not impossible, for a man to believe the promises because they imply that God will do things never seen. The law of God is easy to follow. "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." That is to be seen in every field and in every life. But the grace of God, that is, the heart of the Gospel, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life", that is beyond human experience.

Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him (I Corinthians 2:9).

For a man to believe that God will act in grace toward a sinner, giving His own Son as a Sacrifice for sin that He, the Lord, might carry those sins away and then, being reconciled, that God will regenerate the confessing sinner and will send His Holy Spirit into the believer's heart to comfort, to guide, and to enable the believer to do God's will, all of that, is far beyond human experience. It is difficult for a human being to think that that would actually take place, because it is so different from anything that we commonly, naturally know. All this is truly incredible to the natural man because he has never seen anything like this. So it was necessary that God reveal His grace through dealing with certain human beings.

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Such a one was Abraham, and another was Moses, and another was David. And so were all the prophets. Each of these had experienced some direct dealing with God.

They told about what God had done with each one respectively. It is significant that each of these persons had his or her own personal experience, and could witness and testify to what had happened in his particular case, because that is the way in which it is going to be for us. Each one of us live our lives in our own way. We have our own particular row to hoe. We have our own particular load to carry. We face the particular situation as it is before us. And Almighty God comes to us to help us and to bless us. And as we look in the Scriptures we will find that all these people that the Bible talks about did not live just one kind of life. There was not just one pattern that everyone followed. Each in his own way before God was blessed. On the basis of their testimony other persons could believe that God is and God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.

The coming of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of the believers at Pentecost resulted in each believer having personal direct dealings with the living God. That is easy to say but I wonder have we really grasped the truth of that. The coming of the Holy Spirit makes it possible for each believer to have personal direct dealings with the living God. Thus each believer has something to tell to all men, each believer could be a witness, he could be a witness on the basis of what God had done in his other own life. God can forgive sins. God will forgive sin. God will receive the repentant sinner, will regenerate him and adopt him as a child of His. He will send His Holy Spirit into the heart of the believer.

Paul was a witness for Christ because Paul had had personal dealings with the living Lord. Because he had an unusual experience, he had an unusual testimony. But his being a witness was not unusual.

We have spent some time in our meditations about Paul and we have thought of him as an apostle. That was a special function. But now when we are talking about him as a witness; this is a common experience. This is for anyone and everyone. Paul's experience with the living Lord Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road is commonly known.

We now want to notice that he was immediately a witness. We read, "And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). You do not need any preparation for that, all you need is the experience. After giving his testimony as a witness in Damascus and then in Jerusalem, Paul went back to his home city of Tarsus and spent three years in the Arabian desert.

It was there that Barnabas found him and brought him to Antioch to be a teacher among the Gentile converts. It was later that he was specially chosen with Barnabas through the church at Antioch to go as a missionary. But everywhere that Paul went, he was a witness to Jesus Christ, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.

Paul sets a significant example to all believers in the way in which he varied his procedure according to the people to whom he was witnessing. In Acts 13 we read how Paul witnessed to the Jews in Antioch, in Pisidia. Here he used the Old Testament which the Jews knew and trusted. He used the Old Testament to show how God had prepared His people for the coming of the Messiah, for Christ. In Acts 14, the very next chapter, we read of how Paul witnessed to the pagans at Lystra. Here he referred them to the testimony of nature. He did not quote Scripture but he referred to nature, saying,

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 (Acts 14:17).

From this comment, this point of view, Paul implied that it was in keeping with the gracious things that God had already done among them in natural affairs, that God will do the supremely gracious act in sending Christ to save them.

Now in Acts 17 we read of how Paul witnessed to the intellectual Greeks on Mars' Hill in Athens. Here he referred them to their own thinkers. He used no Scripture but he actually quoted a line of one of the Greek writers as he argued that it should be incredible to them that God would make believers to be His own children. In each case that I have drawn to your attention, namely in Acts 13 with the Jews and Acts 14 with the pagans and Acts 17 with the Greeks, Paul demonstrated the elemental procedure that is effective in all teaching, namely, proceeding from the known to the unknown.

That may sound very simple to you but what we mean by that is that if you are going to share anything with others, you must talk to that person in language that he understands. When our missionaries go to Africa, they learn to speak the African language. If they go to France, they learn to speak the French language. And so when we are thinking for ourselves, each one of us in witnessing to other people try to make it plain just how it is. This is one of the great things about the whole Protestant church. It was begun because the believers at that time of the Reformation had the feeling that the Gospel should be reported in what they call the vernacular, that is the language of the common people.

And so far as you and I are concerned, we understand it better when the message comes to us in the language that we use in our own personal conversations. It is a kind of language that you talk about with each other in the kitchen. The way in which you talk with each other on the street. That is the way you should know about the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that is the way you can witness. In witnessing to other people you do not witness to other people by repeating high sounding words and phrases. You do not witness to other people by saying that you agree with the doctrine that someone else talks about. You witness to other people when you tell them, or you share in some way, what God has done for you personally. The testimony of a newborn soul has great weight.

Chapter 44

Paul On Trial

In reading in the book of Acts as we get the actual historical record of what happened in those early days, we find that time and again Paul was faced by severe criticism in various forms.

At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear (II Timothy 4:16-17).

That is the way Paul put it. A trial is a process of judging, and that means criticizing to discover fault. Usually it comes in reaction to a proposal that the status quo should be changed. You know what we mean by the status quo? The way we have a custom of doing, the way we are accustomed to doing in keeping things. And if anybody makes a proposal that that should be changed, that we should do differently, that we should change our ways, this always arouses resistance.

We all have momentum. We have a tendency to keep on doing whatever we are doing. If we are walking we have a tendency to keep on walking, and if we are standing we want to keep on standing, and if we are sitting we want to keep on sitting. Even if we are thinking we want to keep on thinking what we have been thinking. We do not want the status quo, the way we have been doing, disturbed. We call that disturbing the peace. Anyone who challenges the status quo will face trial. The defenders of the status quo in counter attack bring accusations aiming to show that the disturber of the peace is wrong.

Now all of this which I have discussed in this way is important because it happens when the Gospel is presented. This is what parents run into in their families. This is what parents run into with their children. Children do not want to do differently than they want to do. If they are doing any particular thing, they do not want to be interrupted. And long before they can talk they do not want to be interfered with. That is the way people are. When anybody is preaching the Gospel, he is interfering with people. When you are talking about the Gospel to anybody, you are suggesting that he change his ways. You cannot possibly start talking the Gospel without bringing in the idea that the sinner is wrong. When you accuse him of being wrong, his first tendency is to defend himself and to resist you. You are trying to change things. And that is true. You are trying to change him. And this sort of contention leads into a trial. With many the issue is simply settled in prejudice without any regard to the actual facts involved.

Criticism is actually putting someone on trial. The word "critic" actually comes from the Greek word that means "to judge." Every person is always on trial. No matter what we are doing, no matter where we are going, other people are watching us and evaluating us. It is only when you imply that someone else should change that that trial can lead into violence. I am saying all these things in a general way for us to understand what happened with Paul. Paul faced all manner of trials. In preaching the Gospel he was challenging the status quo of individuals, asking them to turn from their sinful ways to God. His accusers said he was one of those who had turned the world upside down. That is the way he did. You really can see that wherever he came there were changes to be made.

Perhaps Paul's bitterest critics were the Jews. This seems strange on the surface because he was one of them by birth. And he believed in the same God in whom they believed. They knew the Messiah had been promised, just as Paul knew. But he believed more. He believed that Jesus of Nazareth whom they had crucified was truly the Son of God, risen from the dead and alive eternally. Paul did not focus attention upon doctrine or ethics or morals. Later he wrote to the Corinthians words like this: "I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

He put his message on the line, on a take it or leave it basis, and straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues that He is the Son of God. Of course, there was opposition. "But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ" (Acts 9:22).

It is possible that Paul's most intense opponents were the priests, who felt their whole scheme of religion was threatened by the clear plain testimony of one man. But when Paul was brought before their Council to be judged for his witness, the conflict between the Pharisees and the Sadducees in the Council prevented a final judgment. Nevertheless in one city after another Paul was harassed by the Jews who claimed he was destroying their religion. Even among the believers, the influence of the Jews was seen in the teaching of some that Gentile believers must be circumcised in the Jewish tradition to be acceptable. Paul stood his ground as he later expounded in his epistle to the Galatians. He says, "To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you" (Galatians 2:5). And when necessary he differed with others who had been delivered longer than he had been. We read: "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed" (Galatians 2:11).

However, this controversy was settled in friendly fashion by all, including Paul, submitting the question at issue to the judgment of the church as a whole, as we read in the story of the Council at Jerusalem. This was not because of Paul's doctrine but because of the changed lifestyle of some of his converts. When soothsayers and idol makers found that their sales, their income, was shrinking because of Paul's teaching and preaching, they stirred up riots against Paul. He was judged to be harmful and condemned without being given a chance to explain or to defend himself. We must always remember that accusations can be completely false. But the individual has to face them nonetheless.

Paul's most formal trials were with the Roman authorities who actually wanted to be fair. They gave Paul opportunity to defend himself which he did without difficulty. But in each case the judge withheld his sentence which would have cleared Paul for personal advantage. Thus we read, "Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound" (Acts 24:27). And then again we read, "But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure" and finally ended by saying "unto Caesar shalt thou go" (Acts 25:9-12). He set him over to be tried by Caesar. Then in the next chapter, in Acts 26:28, Agrippa having listened to Paul's defense could say, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." But he did not.

Paul was also judged by the pagans on the island of Melita. You remember the story of the big storm when they were cast upon an island. Then the pagans watching these people who had been cast on this island saw how a serpent bit Paul on the hand. When they saw that this serpent bit him, they said, "No doubt this man is a murderer." And this was the way the gods had of getting even with him: they had this snake bite him. But then when he did not die, when he was not poisoned, we read "They changed their minds, and said that he was a god." They were going by signs, not based on anything about Paul really, just going by the way things looked.

In all of this we find how facing trial puts a great responsibility and a great burden on the individual. These trials do not always come on the basis of any real sound argument or evidence. Many times out of prejudice and oftentimes just out of personal advantage, people criticize anybody who is suggesting that they change. This is what we find when we look at Paul on trial. We are remembering all the time while we are talking about Paul that this is what you and I face ourselves. If we have any kind of witness at all we are suggesting to people everywhere that the Lord is God, that the human being would be blessed if he would turn to God. In turning to God, it is necessary to repent of sin and to put trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. But if you do put you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and you do follow Him, you will be different than you were before. When some people sense that difference is involved, they resist. And in the resistance they start to criticize the people who brought the idea there in the first place. This is what happened to Paul and this is what will happen to us.

Chapter 45

Paul And His Critics

For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible (II Corinthians 10:10).

Any person active in public affairs will be criticized. If he is proclaiming something different, unfamiliar, this criticism will be increased. If he is preaching something people do not want to hear, it will be worse. Jesus of Nazareth came to help people but He was criticized in every way. He said, "The servant is not greater than his Master." If they criticized Jesus of Nazareth any person with His message can expect to be criticized. When Mary of Bethany came to anoint the feet of the Lord, she was criticized for using something so costly. There is no possible way for a person following the Lord Jesus Christ to avoid criticism.

Criticism usually picks out one aspect that is undeniable, and then gives it meaning that oftentimes is wholly fictitious, made up. The area in the thinking of the critics may be due to ignorance, but it is often inspired by malice. Paul was an apostle who declared the Gospel with authority. The fact that he did not hesitate to confront the Jews and to accuse them of crucifying their Messiah, drew upon him the intense, bitter hatred of the Jewish community. He was often in danger of losing his life because of their violent opposition. But as an apostle he confronted fellow believers and challenged them to practice their faith in yielding to the living Lord. Paul had no confidence in men. He trusted only God. In reporting his association with other believers he said,

But of those who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me (Galatians 2:6).

That is the way he put it. Thus Paul would be seen as being a critic of all men and it would be only natural that some would in self-defense criticize him. And they did.

"For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible" (II Corinthians 10:10). Here we see that they pointed out two faults, he was not an imposing figure to look to, weak they called him. The only aspect of his physical appearance about which we have any clue was his vision. Apparently, he had poor eyesight. And his speech was contemptible. Paul himself admitted "But though I be rude in speech." The Greek words that are used here do not imply that he was discourteous, but rather that he was unskilled as an orator. But in another place he helps us to understand that this simple style was deliberate.

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God . . . And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God (I Corinthians 2:1-5).

When Paul used the simple dialect of the common man, he knew that he would not impress the intellectuals, but he knew, too, that he could help all men and this he wanted to do.

Paul was criticized at another point that may seem strange to us. At times, as in Corinth, Paul would preach without being paid. Some accused him of not being a real apostle because he took no stipend, no honorarium, no salary. But he was quick to point out that this was part of his strategy to win them. But any of these criticisms is not important to us today as we read his epistles. We notice some other aspects about which we take exception. Some, for instance, would say that his sentences are too long; and they are long. But Paul was writing of truths that were very specific. He did not want to be misunderstood in what he said. The subject matter was very complicated and any time he undertook to make a statement there were so many conditions that had to be referred to and this lengthened the sentence.

Again, people will say Paul's words are so unusual. He was writing about items that were out of this world. Our ordinary language is suitable for ordinary events but Paul was discussing things that are not ordinary, about which we know so little. The words that he would use would refer to those things that are generally out of our ordinary experience. Then again people will say, "He writes about himself too much." We need to remember that Paul is writing as an eye witness. Paul did not claim to know everything but he did know some things. Things that he had seen and heard. The Lord had dealt with Paul directly and it was this that Paul could tell others. He was telling things that were new and unknown to his readers and that he had not read in any book that he would refer to, nor heard it from any other preacher that he could quote.

He had personally encountered the living Lord Himself and he had received revelation directly from Jesus Christ. This he felt he was commissioned to share with others. And so Paul would definitely say, "I have seen this and I have heard that and I have been in this" and so on. At no point is there any indication that Paul considered himself as anyone special. He was not egotistic. He speaks of himself as being not worthy to be an apostle. And again he makes such a comment, "For in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing" (II Corinthians 12:11). Then again some people will say about Paul that he is too dogmatic. The person who makes this criticism simply does not understand the process of teaching. If a person knows the truth and wants to share the truth, he must tell the truth. If he wants his hearers to have a clear conception of the truth, he must state it in a clear fashion. No one would ever wonder what Paul had said about the Lord. He made it plain and in making it plain he was emphatic and dogmatic. This is the way it goes with a teacher who knows what he is taking about.

Then again some people will say he was a woman hater. Now this is a clear case of name calling. At another time I want to discuss some of Paul's doctrines. And at that time we will consider what this doctrine would be with reference to the place of women in spiritual things. But just now I would point out that Paul worked as a co-partner with women. He had women associates in his ministry. And he very highly esteemed them. He looked upon them as servants of the Lord and he appreciated them in so many words. No, the Apostle Paul did not escape criticism, he did not even expect to. That is what he faced. Every mother or father that seeks in any way at all to clearly represent the Gospel to their children is going to find that he or she will be criticized. The children will do the criticism. The neighbors will do the criticism. Sometimes older people in the family will do the criticism. If a person is going to stand for those things that are revealed in the Gospel, there will be criticism.

Those of us who do face such criticism should not be surprised and should not be dismayed, and like the Apostle Paul, we should humbly commit ourselves to God who judges all men. And so far as we are concerned, He is the only one with whom we have to do. So far as people are concerned, we do not want to arouse their animosity, we do not want to arouse their hostility, we will try and do everything we can to be as gentle and as quiet as we possibly can. But some things need to be said plainly. Some things need to be said clearly. Some things need to be said and said and said. In spite of the opposition whatever is true needs to be set forth. And in so doing, the speaker, the teacher, the witness is going to find that there will be people in opposition who will find it very easy to criticize him. They did it with Paul. But Paul put his trust in the Lord and went by that, and was strengthened in his testimony.

Chapter 46

Paul's Message About Sin

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy Scriptures,) concerning his son Jesus Christ our Lord, with was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:1-4).

This is the way the Apostle Paul begins his epistle to the Romans. Paul had a very clear understanding of his mission in the world. In addition to being one of the believers in Christ who had been given the Great Commission, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19), he had been given personal commission from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

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 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 26:16-18).

No wonder he was separated unto the Gospel of God.

Such work as Paul was to do was referred to as the ministry of reconciliation. His task was to lead men to God. His privilege was to proclaim the Good News that this reconciliation would actually be the work of God Himself. God is invisible. No man has seen God at any time. So anything man ever learns about God must be communicated to him. Not only is the very existence of God out of sight, but His character also is unknown to man. Yet man is dependent upon God. Everything man needs for a living is provided for him by God. And it is all free. More is available than man can ever use. The world surrounds man and offers all manner of possibilities but man cannot do as he pleases. He is given the freedom and the power of choice but he is responsible. He must answer to God for what he chooses. God sees all that man does and judges it. Any choice by man which is not like God is sin. Sin is a God word. Man commits crime against man but he commits sin against God. And the soul that sinneth it shall die. Now there is no man that sinneth not. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Thus, the sentence of death, as a consequence of sin; has passed out over all men.

But in judgment God remembers mercy. We all remember that wonderful verse, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Then again we remember how Paul put it, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Yet this grace from God is provided upon conditions. The human being must confess his sin; he must repent and believe. Many are ignorant about God and about sin. Many try to cover up, to hide their sins. They want to act as if there were no sin. So God in His great grace and tender mercy sends prophets, preachers, to show the people their own sins. Thus John the Baptist was a man sent from God who preached to all men calling upon them to repent, to confess their sins and to believe the Gospel. It is wonderfully true that Jesus of Nazareth was "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." And by His death He made it possible for a sinner to come to God as free. It is also true that He came and died to deliver men from their sin. I wonder if you noted just what you have just read, that Christ Jesus' death removes the guilt but His resurrection from the dead delivers the believer from the clutch of sin. The believer can be free from it. It is natural for a man to want to justify himself. No one wants to admit that he or she is wrong but in order to be forgiven by God, one must confess to God that he or she is a sinner.

In writing his letter to the believers in Rome, Paul discussed the matter of sin as it appeared in the three classes of people. First he considers all men everywhere and we will read this in Romans 1:17-32 where

he traces the origin of all religious faith back to the personal conduct of all men. He begins by noting that all men had some knowledge of God. But they are without excuse.

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things (Romans 1:21-23).

Here is the record of the origin of all religions, all man-made. And then comes a sobering revelation. God gave them up.

Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen (Romans 1:24-25).

And also we read "For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections."

And finally in verse 28 we read:

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient (Romans 1:28).

I can remember when I first noticed this in my reading of the Bible. I came to believe in God after I was a grown man. Then I began to read the Bible to find out what God had to say. As I read along in here I was shocked by this sobering truth that God actually gives people up, that He gave them up to uncleanness, and He gave them up to vile affections, and He gave them over to a reprobate mind. All because they did not humbly turn to Him.

In the second place Paul addresses those who know enough of the truth to be able to judge and to criticize others. Paul has no hesitation to say that these are sinners, saying, "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest." And so in Romans 2:1-12 we find out that God will judge according to the performance of people, even those who do not know the Scriptures. Then we read on in Romans 2:12-16 that those who do not know the Scriptures themselves have their own consciences, and they know personally that they are sinners. So far Paul has discussed the situation confronting all men everywhere.

But now in the third phase Paul considers those who know the Scriptures and who feel able to judge others. Paul does not hesitate to question the standing of anybody that knows what to do and does not do it. Thus Paul covers all men in his discussion of sin, and summarizes it all in so many words, both Jews and Gentiles that they are all under sin. You find this in the first three chapters in the book of Romans.

Chapter 47

Paul's Message About Salvation

Salvation is the work of God, even as creation is the work of God. The Bible tells about creation in the opening chapters of Genesis. And Paul talks about salvation in Romans 3-8. In creation man was made in the image of God out of the dust of the ground. In salvation those who believe in Jesus Christ are born again as new creatures, as the children of God, by His Word. Apparently, God created man so that His beloved Son might be the firstborn among many brethren. In the world of nature Adam was the first man and all children as human beings have the life of Adam. In the world of the Spirit, Jesus of Nazareth was the second man, "as the Lord from heaven" (1 Corinthians 15:45-47). Human beings are born into the world of nature by physical generation. Believers in Christ are born again into the world of Spirit by the Word of God. In the first creation each person is born without his consent and has in him the sinful life of Adam. In salvation each person is born again if he believes in Christ and has in him the eternal life of God.

Paul tells about salvation in the epistle to the Romans in chapter 3 from verse 12 on to the end of the chapter. Paul points out that all men as created in Adam are sinners, but also that all are eligible to receive forgiveness and to be created again in Christ by the grace of God. In Romans, chapter 4, Paul makes clear that his prospect of becoming acceptable to God after being a sinner is not to be achieved by any virtue of man on the basis of what man does. It is something that God will provide in His grace for anyone who will commit himself to God by believing the promise of God. This is a very simple truth but it is very profound. Man does not become acceptable to God by any virtue of his on the basis of what he does. But being acceptable to God is something that God will provide in His grace to anyone who will commit himself to God by believing the promises of God.

In Romans chapter 5 Paul expounds the operation of faith. The believer is not only reconciled to God by the death of Jesus Christ so that he has peace with God, but he receives in himself the grace of God through the present ministry of the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ. This enables him to live and move in communion with God. You see there is more to salvation than just being saved from death. It includes the matter of being saved into life. In the latter part of chapter 5, verses 12-21 Paul summarizes the amazing work of grace in salvation. Just as each human being as a child of Adam shared in death because of the sin of Adam, quite apart from any sin of his own doing, so each believer as a child of God shares in eternal life because of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, quite apart from any righteousness of his own doing, it is the gift of God.

To be sure, so far as I am concerned as a human being, it was not my fault that Adam sinned. But he did. And now as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ it is not to my credit that Jesus Christ lived a perfect life, but He did. And just as I shared as a child of Adam in the life and death of Adam, so as a child of God I share in the life and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the gift of God.

In Romans, chapters 6- 7, Paul discusses in more detail the operation of the grace of God in delivering the believer from sin. Here is set forth the truth of the two natures involving the believer, which Paul identifies as flesh and spirit. By flesh Paul refers to the carnal nature of man, as a child of Adam. And by spirit, Paul refers to the spiritual nature of the believer as a child of God. Paul points out that sin infects the carnal nature which was derived from Adam and which is under the sentence of death. Through faith the believer identifies his carnal nature with the body of Jesus of Nazareth which was crucified. By faith the believer shares in the death of the body of Jesus of Nazareth and thus is eligible to share in the resurrection from the dead by the power of God even as Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead. Using the figure of how a woman by the death of her husband is set free to marry another man, Paul argues that the death of the carnal nature by identification with Jesus of Nazareth on the cross sets the believer free to serve God in righteousness by the grace of God through the living Christ Jesus now in

glory.

In an eloquent passage in the latter part of chapter 7, verses 18-25, Paul describes the conflict in the experience of a believer between his old carnal nature which is grounded in his flesh and is inclined to selfishness and sin, and his new spiritual nature which is grounded in the Spirit of God and is inclined to obey the law of God. The solution to this dilemma which exists in the believer because of these two natures is set forth by Paul in Romans chapter 8. Having pointed out in chapter 7 that the best intentions of the believer will be unable to overcome the basic inclination to sin, Paul now elaborates in chapter 8 the wonderful privilege of letting God Himself do His will in the believer by the operation of the Holy Spirit. There is no doubt in Paul's mind about the carnal nature. He says for example in Romans, chapter 8, verse 8: "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." That is a plain, positive statement. Nor is there any doubt in his mind about the deliverance through the Holy Spirit. In Romans we read:

So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh (now he is writing to believers) but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you (Romans 8:8-11).

That is very profound and yet very simple.

It is like saying the stairs may be so high and so long that you will not be able to walk it but if you will get into the elevator you will be lifted up there without any trouble. It is a marvelous thing to be lifted by the power of God and I am sure that many of you are just wishing "Oh I wish it would take place in me.

I wish it would take place in me" and it will. Not a hundred percent at anyone moment, not necessarily, but it will begin at any one moment with you. Let me point out to you, as Paul goes on to point out, that the Holy Spirit not only activates the will of God who is in us, but also helps the believer to be free from infirmities lingering because of past carnal habits. As long as we have the old man, as long as we have the old flesh in our being and we are conscious of ourselves and we are human beings and we have our bodies, the old man in us, the human nature in us, develops certain habits. We have certain ways of doing things. These cling to us and we have difficulty about them.

Let us keep two things in mind. In the first place, so far as the sin of it is concerned, Christ Jesus died for it and carried it away. You do not have to worry about any guilt in the matter. Almighty God knows all about that and Christ Jesus has carried the sin away. Now so far as the actual practical experience is concerned, and you are still involved in that which is of the flesh, let me tell you that the promise is that God will deliver you from that. Now you will be completely and finally delivered when the flesh of yours is six feet under in the grave. But in actual experience you can, as it were, believe it to be there, exercising your faith, putting your trust in God, looking to Him for help, counting it to be so, praying that it should be so. Every time you and I can count the flesh dead by just that much, we are free from the old habits and the old sins. This is the nature and the performance, the operation of salvation. as we read it in Scripture.

Chapter 48

Paul's Message About Israel

The revelation of the Gospel was given bit by bit over generations of time. The Gospel is the story of what God is going to do in grace and mercy to save sinners. Now this is something no human being would ever have thought. We know that the soul that sinneth, it shall die. That would seem to be clear and plain. If that is the way God is going to run the universe then that is the way in which it is. But what people are not prepared to expect is that the same God who would judge sin and condemn sin will actually provide for the sinner to be forgiven and to be saved. And this is what is in the Gospel. Now that was not said in so many words. That was given out bit by bit over generations of time. We read in the book of Hebrews:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds (Hebrews 1:1-2).

We know that God called Abraham and promised him that through his seed all nations would be blessed. That promise was repeated to Isaac and then to Jacob and then to his children who became the people of Israel. For a length of time Israel existed as a nation. And then as a divided nation cherishing the traditions of their history and holding forth the Ten Commandments as the law of God. In New Testament times the nation of Judea had been conquered by the Romans but the Jews had a strong traditional establishment centered in their temple worship. They professed to belong to God and were diligent in seeking His favor by keeping regulations led by the priests. When Jesus of Nazareth came to reveal the Word of God His message was resisted by these priests who finally stirred the people to clamor for the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. When the disciples began witnessing for Christ and His resurrection, the priests opposed the Gospel much more strenuously than the Gentiles did. When Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans he discussed the problems of the Jews in chapters 9, 10 and 11. To begin with he made it very emphatic that he had real concern about his brethren.

I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh (Romans 9:1-3).

Paul realized that the Jewish people had very important advantages in their culture. But went on to say:

For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but in Isaac shall thy seed be called (Romans 9:6-7).

Thus, whereas Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, the blessing was upon Isaac and Isaac had two sons, Esau and Jacob, but the blessing was upon Jacob. So not all the Jews should be considered to be in God's will simply because they were biologically Jews. Paul is laying down the premise for his opposition to what the Jews were doing about the Gospel. The blessing of God is not to be earned or achieved by works but it is to be received as a gift from God. Thus some Gentiles received it as a gift while some in Israel missed it because they tried to work for it. This was the classic error of the Jews.

Brethren, my hearts' desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God (Romans 10:1-3).

Paul admitted that the Jews had zeal but they were mistaken in thinking that righteousness with God could be established by their own efforts. Paul went on to say "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth" (Romans 10:4).

The fact is that God sends out His word, His promise, and "whosoever will" respond in faith receives

the blessing of God as a gift. As a matter of history, this was really not new nor different. Since there always had been some who heard and believed and were blessed Paul speaks of these believing people as the remnant and refers to them as the election of grace. It appears that blindness in part had happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. So Paul urges the Gentile believers to think graciously about the Jews because God could bring them, the Jews, into Himself again as His own, in His own time and in His own will. A profound spiritual truth is implied here for our own time. The term Israel should never be taken as referring to a biological group. Even as the term church or congregation should not be taken as biological or even a cultural group. As a matter of fact they are not all Christians who are of the Christians. No doubt there are many in the congregation and may even be members of the church who are not born-again believers. Their parents were church members, they went to church as children, they believed all the things that the church reported, but they never yielded to any of them. They accepted these things and joined the church because they were in favor of these things and wanted to belong but they did not want to change. Some of these church members who have come in that way can be misled to thinking that because their parents were members of the church and because they personally do believe in God and in the historic facts of the Gospel, and because they have attended Sunday School and church services, they also should be held as believers. Some may even try to maintain a good record of church attendance, of giving money to the church and to missions with the thought in mind of qualifying for the blessing of God. But they are all mistaken. This is all beside the point. Because, unless you commit yourself to God, unless you believe in Him, it does not work in your case. Paul would refer to these as having a zeal of God but not according to knowledge, not according to the truth.

The sad fact is that some such never have peace because they fear they are not good enough, whereas some are proud because they feel they are better than others. If you think that you are doing it in your own strength you cannot help but wonder how you are making out. And if you feel that you have done very well, you get proud about that. And if you feel for any reason that you have not done well enough, you can be very discouraged about that, and even be upset by it and think to yourself "I will never make it." The great truth of the Gospel is you will not make it, that is true. And you are not expected to make it. Christ Jesus made it for you and the truth of the Gospel is that if you believe in Him, God will receive you and God will bless you.

I can remember years ago when I was studying in the Old Testament and tracing through in the teaching of the prophets, I came across this and it almost startled me to realize it; God was, as it were, checking up on the children of Israel. They had failed again and again and again and, He had finally worn out His patience. And then it says almost in so many words, that since they are not going to be able to do it, Almighty God decided He would do it Himself and He would provide a way of establishing the fact that some would belong to Him and he would do it by giving it to them. And so He made promises and offered it to them. Now you might say "Then everybody would have it." Only those who receive it. You say, "Why wouldn't they receive it?" Because some folks are just vain enough to think that they can do it themselves.

A great many people like to have their own liberty; they like to do it in their own way; they want to do it in their own time. They want to read the Bible when they please or if they please. If they do not please to read it, they do not read it. They want to pray when they please and if they please. If they do not please, they do not want to pray. They do not think they have to. They think they do not have to do these things. And by that, they are betraying the fact, they are revealing the fact that deep down in their heart they really do not want to do these things. It is not in their mind to do these things and the reason why is that they have not been born again. They are not the children of God. They are still the children of Adam. They are in themselves. These folks simply do not realize that the only ground for acceptance before God in Christ is that Christ Jesus died on Calvary's cross for their sins. And anyone who will come to "God on that basis will be received. Thus it was with Israel, and this it is with Israel even to this day. The Apostle Paul

himself would say that if anybody were to think that no Jew would ever accept Christ, he was a Jew. If someone were to say "The people of Israel are completely shut out;" no, there is a remnant that believes. Paul was in the remnant. And so we see how it is that God is dealing with these people. At this time, in other places in Scripture we read that when they read the Scriptures, when the Jewish people read the Scriptures, generally speaking, a veil is over their heart so that they cannot see and believe the very things that they are reading about the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

Chapter 49

Paul's Message About Living In Faith

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Romans 12:1-2).

Salvation means more than escape from destruction. It does mean that, but it means more. The idea that to be saved means that I am not going to hell when I die is very true, but much more is true. It means that I am born again. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Corinthians 5:17). My carnal nature with its sinful appetite and its evil habits is reckoned to be crucified with Christ. My spiritual nature which I have in the resurrection of Jesus Christ has the disposition to obey the will of God. Paul describes how this will operate in the last five chapters in his epistle to the Romans.

The first action is basic to all that follows. Even as Jesus of Nazareth voluntarily went to His death on the cross, He says, "Because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself" (John 10:17-18). So believers are led to present their bodies a living sacrifice that they might be transformed by the renewing of their mind. In the newness of life, each believer has his or her own unique gift to serve the Lord, as different from each other as the several members of his own body differ from each other. Each believer will serve according to his ability but in all that he does he will manifest the grace of his Lord and Master. Believers will be kindly affectionate one to another in brotherly love and will live humbly among all men. They will "recompense to no man evil for evil . . . If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:17-18). They will be especially careful to "avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath" (Romans 12:19) leaving to the Lord, the righteous Judge, to deal with evildoers.

This is going to come out in the individual believer as he allows the presence of God, the Holy Spirit within his soul, to prompt him in the ways of God. In all matters which involved the public civil affairs in the community, believers will humbly be "subject unto the higher powers". They are going to obey the law; accepting those in authority as being ordained of God. That does not mean every policeman is a good man. That does not mean that every governor is an honest person. But in the place that he serves, in the function that he performs, that is, as it were, ordained of God in the sense that God let that be and He set the seal of His will, His approval, upon that situation. Human beings are not perfect by any manner of means. In no place will they ever be able to demonstrate that they are going to do everything they ought to do, but they have their places ordained of God. Believers will be obedient citizens, paying their taxes and render therefore, to all their dues, being careful to owe no man anything but to love one another because love worketh no ill to his neighbor. Believers will be careful to walk honestly as in the day and to make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lust thereof. That is the way Paul puts it. You can almost feel in your heart "Nobody could do that." When thinking as a human being you are right. No human being could, but Paul never expected any human being would. That is not the story. That is what will happen when you yield yourself to God and let God live in you. In dealing with each other, believers should recognize that persons are different. What seems right to one may not seem right to another. Therefore believers should not criticize or judge one another.

Each one is responsible only to the Lord. Paul wrote "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." Isn't that broad? Isn't that amazing? Let me say it to you again, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Romans 14:5). I do not need to take time out to argue with you and show you that that would not mean that he is allowed to do evil, but there is a side range of possibilities in what a person could do and still not be doing wrong. Each believer is responsible for his own conduct. Paul writes, "For

we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Romans 14:10). And it is definitely true as Paul writes, "So then everyone of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). And by the way, when you have that, you can just think again to yourself "Not to one another, but to God."

Instead of judging one another each believer should judge himself. Actions of men are not evil in themselves but they are evil when they hurt others. Just because some action is right in one's own eyes does not give me liberty to act that way. I am responsible to "destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died" (Romans 14:15). At this point Paul writes very sternly and we will find words like this:

For meat (that is for the privilege of eating meat that was offered to idols) destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offense. It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth (Romans 14:20-22).

You know, of course, what that means. Happy is the man who does not condemn himself by doing the very thing that he thinks is all right because he could be doing the very thing he thinks is all right and in doing that he could be hurting someone else.

And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin (Romans 14:23).

That is the most penetrating definition of sin in the Bible. "For whatsoever is not of faith", in other words, anything that I would do when I am not conscious of God, thinking about God is sin. Faith, you see, points out God. Faith reaches out to the very presence of God. And anything that I do that is not subject to the personal presence and the will of God is sin. Paul recognizes that this line of thought puts a burden on the believer who understands the great liberty provided in the Gospel. I often say about all that, that eating an apple is not a sin, there is nothing wrong with it. But if I eat your apple, that is sin because I am stealing. That has nothing to do with the apple, but it has to do with my conduct. Such believers are responsible to be careful not to ignore the infirmities of the weak. You know there are some people who have right funny ideas about living. There are some things they just cannot stand. There are some things they think are wrong. And I am just liable to blunder into it and I am just liable to act in a way that actually is distressing and hurtful to other people. And Paul says to me, "Be very conscious of other people. Keep your eye on them and do not do anything that will upset anybody else." When their actions are displeasing to other believers, believers should not take their liberty to please themselves.

Paul then discussed in the latter part of Romans his own ministry among the Gentiles, and urges the believers to recognize that God called him to this special ministry as he says, "That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles." In his many salutations to individuals which Paul puts at the end of this epistle, Paul reveals his personal interest in fellow believers and fellow workers. And, by the way, he warned against "them which cause division and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Romans 16:17). And what is the doctrine that you have learned with reference to other believers? They belong to God, too. And because they belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, they belong to you and to me. We are members one of another. We are different, we think differently, we judge differently and we would act differently if we worked on our own, but we are not to work on our own. We are to be subject to the Lord Jesus Christ and the Lord has them all in mind and works in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure and other people will not get hurt.

Chapter 50

A Church In Trouble

The epistles of Paul in the New Testament were all written to believers in Jesus Christ to help them in their living by faith. When a person accepts the Gospel as true and receives Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, he is regenerated as a child of God and is given the Holy Spirit as his Comforter and his Guide. This new believer is considered a babe in Christ. Peter wrote, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (I Peter 2:2). It was characteristic of Paul that he stayed for a time where new converts came to Christ to teach them and to guide them into maturity as believers. Then as he continued in his journey to preach Christ in regions where the Gospel was unknown, he would remember those who had become believers. He would pray for them constantly, and on occasion would send one of his own co-workers in the Gospel to check how the new believers were getting along. Sometimes he would write a personal letter which should be read to the congregation that they all might benefit from Paul's faith and understanding.

Apparently, the congregation in Corinth had written to Paul to ask about certain problems that had developed among them. Also, Paul had learned from others of conditions that had arisen in Corinth to disturb the fellowship among the believers. Such problems would arise because these believers were young in their faith and so would need to learn how to face issues as led by the Holy Spirit. We might keep in mind that so far as believers are concerned, they have the natural body and are natural persons with natural experiences and natural habits. Then they become believers and as believers they are born again. In the new man that is in Christ Jesus they develop new outlooks, new attitudes, new habits. And oftentimes there is then this conflict between the two. Paul is dealing with this in dealing with these believers in Corinth.

Paul shows wisdom as he begins this letter. Since he is going to note problems that have arisen because of their conduct, he begins by noting how they have been blessed, saying,

That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that ye come behind in no gift (I Corinthians 1:5-7)

That would seem like praising them, but he is acknowledging the fact that he realized that this is a church that has been blessed. The first problem that Paul deals with is the divisive party spirit, manifested in personal loyalty to former pastors. He writes:

Now this I say, that everyone of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ (I Corinthians 1:12).

Paul points out this is evidence of their immaturity. They are acting like babies. They could know that the superiority any minister would have would not be to his personal credit. It would be something that he had been given from God. In fact everything he had, had been given to him. Thus to God belongs the glory. And in any case the minister is only serving God, not himself.

All the ministers are on one team working to do God's will. This is set forth in chapters 1-4. The next problem discussed in chapter 5 was the toleration of immorality in the congregation. Paul says that such toleration should not be. The only way to keep the body healthy is to amputate the infected members. In the first part of chapter 6, Paul points out the blemish of quarrelsomeness which leads into civil lawsuits between members. This again is a mark of childishness. The welfare of the congregation would be advanced if the injured party would simply endure the wrong. Paul writes:

Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded (I Corinthians 6:7)?

The next problem was the common practice of the sin of fornication. Here the apostle stresses the

positive truth of the Gospel that the body belongs to the Lord as the temple of the Holy Spirit and urges the believers to use it as such. Paul's words are:

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's (I Corinthians 6:19-20).

In chapter 7, Paul answers questions about marriage and divorce. His problem becomes complicated when one spouse is a believer in Christ and the other is not. Paul recognizes that the separation of husband and wife may occur even involving believers. He stresses that the believer should always seek God's will. In chapters 8, 9 and 10 Paul deals with the problem of the believer living among pagans. Some customs of the community may originate in pagan beliefs and the question may arise whether a believer in Christ should share in such practices that everybody in the community is doing. Different persons will have different ideas. Paul admonished believers to control their own conduct in such a way as not to give offense to others. He referred to his own lifestyle as an illustration, in saying about himself,

For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law . . . I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some (I Corinthians 9:19-22).

In chapter 11, in verses 1-16, Paul deals with a local problem, feminism. Women were taking an undue prominence in public affairs. In the Corinthian congregation women were prone to take dominance. Paul argued that this was not natural, and advised against it. "But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God" (I Corinthians 11:16). He gave this opinion, but he did not press it down to say that it had to be that way. Because as we pointed out earlier, human beings are different and as they develop they develop differently. They have different ideas and because of this, what seems right to one person may not seem right to another person. In this case, with reference to women being so prominent, Paul gave his opinion and gave his reasons for it but he winds up by saying, "If any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom," meaning to say we would not make it a law, "neither the churches of God."

In the latter part of chapter 11 Paul deals with disorder in worship services. In coming to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, some members indulged themselves in overeating and in over-drinking. Paul wrote sharply to discourage this saying, "What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?" He urged that these believers practice reverence, doing all to the glory of God.

In chapters 12, 13 and 14 Paul dealt with the matter of gifts, the gifts of the Spirit. He said this congregation came behind in no gifts, but they were just childish enough to be proud of the gifts that they had. Paul argued that gifts differ as the members of the body differ. Some were naturally more prominent, that is, some of the believers would have gifts that would be more noticeable, but all were necessary and useful. Satisfaction should not be sought in the function of any gift, but in the welfare of the body as a whole. We are well acquainted with chapter 13 wherein Paul speaks about the significance of love, but we should not overlook chapter 12 in which he points out that the various different gifts are like the various members of one body. They differ from one another but they are all important, and are all necessary. Then in chapter 14 Paul goes on to say that there should not be any argument about these things. He points out that argument among believers about their gifts gives a wrong impression, a false impression, a bad impression to the community round about. In chapter 15 the problem that Paul discussed was error in doctrine. Wrong ideas were being spread about the resurrection. Paul took the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth as the case in point and expounded from that what resurrection would mean for all believers. Because their own resurrection was certain, Paul urged all believers saying,

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord (I Corinthians 15:58).

And so Paul wrote this letter to this church to help them with all their various problems, pointing out all the way through that the basic truth was that they belonged to God. Because each one of the believers belonged to God, no one believer could have dominance over another. Each one should be faithful to the Lord who gave Himself for them, and who was keeping them in fellowship with God.

Chapter 51

Paul In A Congregation

Corinth was one city where Paul served for some time as pastor. In his second letter to the believers in Corinth, who were his church members, Paul wrote as a pastor. In our study of this epistle, II Corinthians, two lines of truth may be noted. First, Paul will reveal the frame of mind that belongs to a pastor, and so by noting his subjects of discussion the reader can get a grasp of the problems which would draw a pastor's attention. As a pastor Paul wanted his parishioners to grow and to be fruitful as believers. And he would see himself as a person who could culture the believers to have stronger faith and more effectual results. In his letter Paul records his own thinking in understanding how he could help to bring the believers along the way of growing and of serving the Lord.

In the first chapter in verses 3- 7 Paul acknowledged the troubles a pastor experiences actually enabled him to help his people. Paul wrote about God:

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God (II Corinthians 1:3-4).

He then went on to recall the troubles that he had had while preaching in Asia Minor, remembering that he had been strengthened by trusting in God and encouraged by the faithful support of the Corinthian believers who prayed for him as their former pastor. Paul had been strengthened also by his own deliberate procedure in serving God. He writes:

For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward (II Corinthians 1:12).

As Paul planned his itinerary he did not depend on human considerations but was totally yielded to God's guidance. And so he could write:

When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness? or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yea, yea, and nay, nay (II Corinthians 1:17)?

Paul lived out his life in service remembering, "Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God" (II Corinthians 1:21). This gave him confidence. With the orientation in the will of God Paul also exercised his judgment in his conduct that he might be an effective pastor. He had been obligated to come with blunt words of correction on a former visit but he did not want this aspect of his function to become the major impression that he wished to make. And so he wrote:

But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness (II Corinthians 2:1).

He expressed the hope that they had administered the discipline which he had urged them to do in brotherly love, because the soul of the offender was precious to the Lord, and Paul was aware of the danger that could follow when they disciplined that soul. He wrote:

Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices (II Corinthians 2:11).

Paul recognized his significance as a minister of the Word and so we read:

Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God:

but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ (II Corinthians 2:14-17).

Paul considered the Corinthian believers the evidence of his integrity as a minister of Christ. He wrote: "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men" (II Corinthians 3:2). He esteemed his personal suffering as being related to his achievement as pastor but he endured all in the expectation of appearing before the judgment seat of Christ. "Wherefore we labor (we are ambitious), that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him" (II Corinthians 5:9).

Everything Paul did was done with the purpose of winning souls to God. "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us" (II Corinthians 5:20). In all his deals Paul was careful, giving no offense in anything, that the ministry be not blamed. But Paul urged the believers to live lives separated from the unbelievers And so we read a very stern passage:

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (II Corinthians 6:14-7:1).

That is the way Paul put it in talking to these people.

Because he was eager that his admonitions would be taken seriously Paul reviewed his own relation to their past experiences. He had gladly suffered that they might prosper. It was true that he had rebuked them, but he had done this because of his love for them. Here we see the true pastor's heart. He reminded them of how they had been blessed when they followed his guidance.

Paul then emphasized the importance of liberality in the life of a believer He mentioned the testimony of the believers in Macedonia who had been blessed by the grace of God by way of arousing the believers in Corinth to seek that grace. He did not command them to be liberal but he urged them to cultivate this grace.

For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich (II Corinthians 8:9).

Though he distinctly left it to their own volition he made it plain as he wrote:

But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully (II Corinthians 9:6).

You cannot put it much plainer than that. He was encouraged to make this emphasis because he knew God would bless them. And he wrote:

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work (II Corinthians 9:8).

Paul understood that there were those who disparaged him.

Paul made no pretensions. He served without salary and he used the common language of the common people. He never put on a big front. But he had definitely chosen to work along spiritual not human lines, saying, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal" (II Corinthians 10:4). Since the question had been raised as to his authenticity as a minister, people wondered whether he was real because he did not take any salary and because he was so humble and he talked so simply, Paul allowed himself to recount the record of his activities, challenging comparison with anybody else. But he himself did not base his confidence on his prodigious labors which he recounted in chapter 11. He based his assurance of usefulness

in God's plan on his personal spiritual experiences with the living God. After he described the ineffable blessedness of experiencing heaven, which you will find a record of in chapter 12:1-4, he told how God helped him by giving him a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble. When he had prayed for deliverance from this, and he did ask God to take it away several times, he was told it was there to keep him weak. And then Paul said:

Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me
(II Corinthians 12:9).

Paul concluded his defense of his ministry by summing up everything he had done, saying to them,

Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds
(II Corinthians 12:12).

Paul expected to visit Corinth again and demonstrate once more all he had affirmed, and closing his message said to them, "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (II Corinthians 13:11). And thus we have in the second epistle of Paul to the Corinthians a glimpse of a pastor's heart and of a pastor's concern who really wants to help his people grow in the things of the Lord and serve Almighty God.

Chapter 52

The Gospel Of Grace

At the very beginning of Scripture we learn how God created man in His own image, that His Son might be the firstborn among many brethren. The record shows that the first man sinned and involved all men in sin with the sentence of death upon them. But in judgment God remembered mercy so that, when the whole world was destroyed by the flood, Noah and his family were saved. Later God called Abraham to a life of faith and promised that through his seed all nations would be blessed. This promise was duly repeated to Jacob and to his seed, the nation Israel. God gave the Ten Words as a guide for blessing but Israel continued in sin despite the prophets who preached the law and finally God promised that Messiah would come who would personally lead God's people into blessing.

In the fullness of time, God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus of Nazareth, as the Christ to give His life a ransom for man. When Christ had died and had been raised from the dead and received into heaven, the Holy Spirit had been sent forth into the hearts of believers to lead them into the will of God. Thus the whole operation of salvation would be the work of God even as creation had been. It was a work that God would do in His own power by raising believers out of their dying human natures into the undying eternal life of God Himself. That is the way it is now. Man does not contribute to it. God does it. Man has a proclivity to trust himself and his own works instead of trusting God and His grace. Such efforts on the part of man to justify himself by what he does changes the operation of salvation from receiving a gift to earning a reward. And this amounts to denying the Gospel. Again I can say that in so many words, but I wonder if it registers in your heart and mind whether you can feel it. Let me repeat that the matter of understanding the Gospel as something God will do is very, very important. It is strictly what God will do. Man receives it and man responds to it, but man does not initiate it. He does not start it, nor does he carry it out. He does not have the strength. This is something that God does.

In his epistle to the Romans, Paul had noted that the classic errors of the Jews in his time had been that they tried to establish their own righteousness instead of yielding themselves to receive the righteousness of God as a gift. In the region of Galatia some teachers had become active among the believers in Christ who taught that in addition to accepting the sacrifice of Christ on the cross for the remission of sins, it was necessary to be circumcised after the manner of the Jews. Thus circumcision, which was a work of man, was considered as qualifying the believer to receive the grace of God. Paul took strong objection to this doctrine and wrote his epistle to the Galatians to show this error. Paul began his epistle by a blunt denial of the validity of any such teachings.

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8).

That is the way Paul put it. He said it twice. There is no doubt about what he meant. He recounted the history of how he had learned the Gospel from the Lord Himself directly. He traced his limited contacts with the other well known leaders among the brethren to show that he had been accepted as an apostle from the very first. As a matter of fact, on occasion he had even corrected their conduct as he was in touch with them and had seen what they had done.

To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you . . . but when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed (Galatians 2:5,11).

It was very clear in Paul's mind "for the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Galatians 2:16). Paul did not think of himself as seeking to obey any directives from anyone but of having the living Lord live His life in Paul. He had made that famous statement that we all cherish:

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

In arguing for the operation of grace apart from the law Paul recalls the history of Abraham. Abraham received the promise of God 400 years before the Ten Commandments were revealed. The law does have a function as a schoolmaster to show what is acceptable to God, but was never the basis of acceptance before God. In other words while the law is helpful to show you what God wants you to do, doing it will never get you right with God. No one could ever do it perfectly. We get to be right with God through believing in Christ. God's grace is free and it is available to "whosoever believeth." When the soul comes to God in repentance, confessing his sin, God receives such as His own. He regenerates the soul in a second birth and then gives the Holy Spirit as a Comforter and Guide. God does all this in His grace and mercy.

To be sure the believer is involved in two worlds: in his carnal constitution the believer is in the world of the flesh; whereas in his spiritual being he is in the world of the Spirit. This constitutes a dilemma which confronts the believer with a challenge. Paul writes:

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would (Galatians 5:16-17).

That is the way Paul describes the ordinary experience of the ordinary believer. And then Paul listed a description of the works of the flesh which the believer will repudiate. He is against it. And Paul follows this with a description of the fruit of the Spirit which the believer will yearn to produce in his living.

As long as the believer lives in this world the carnal nature will be a constant threat. You see, as long as I am in the flesh, as long as I am alive in this world, I have the old man with me, and he wants to do his will all the time. I have that to watch. But by the grace of God when I believed in the Lord Jesus Christ I have a new man in me, and the new man is against what the old man wants. Paul urges believers to wisely choose to follow the guidance of the Spirit saying,

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not (Galatians 6:9).

This is a great truth and this is what Paul brings out in the book of Galatians.

It is a wonderful thing to be saved by the grace of God because God does it. It is so helpful to be able to assure anybody who is discouraged and feels he will never make it. Every now and again we come across people who have the feeling "I will never make it." You are right, you will never make it, and God knows that you will not make it. So now you know it, too. But the truth is, Christ Jesus will make it, and He will do it on your behalf. You will never qualify for life by your own efforts, but He will lift you into the presence of God. By the works of the flesh, what you can do as a human being, you will never be fit for eternity, but by the power of God through the grace that is in Christ Jesus He will lift you up and take you home to Himself. You as a believer in Christ can actually belong to Him.

This was said in the book of Romans, but in the book of Galatians Paul develops it and he brings it out more and more. It is very important to do certain things that all believers do. You join the church, you are baptized, you make a public profession of Christ; and all of that is important. But the doing of that does not get you right with God. What gets you right with God is that Christ Jesus died for you, and you put your trust in Him. This is right with God if nothing else ever happens. These are things that Paul is emphasizing in the book of Galatians.

Chapter 53

The Church As The Body Of Christ

Paul describes salvation as the work of God by which a sinner is reconciled to God, accepts Christ as Savior and Lord and then lives in obedience to the will of God, bringing glory to God. All of that is involved. After the believer has been born again as a child of God, and has received the Holy Spirit which God gives as Comforter and Guide to everyone who believes in Him. The believer lives in fellowship with other believers. The believer now has the aspect of personal relationships in which he must do the will of God. In accepting Jesus Christ the believer not only takes Him as Savior, but also receives Him as Lord. The Holy Spirit is sent forth into his heart to enable the believer to know the will of God for the believer's guidance. This relationship is set forth in a figure wherein the believer is seen as a member of a body of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the Head. The head determines what will be done, and the members of the body obey the head in their actions. Thus the believer has a broad relationship with all other believers as fellow members of the same body.

At the same time the believer is still in the world as a human being and so has relations with all other human beings in the course of which he is led to act in line with the will of God. The believer acts among men in a personal way as a fellow human being who is serving God. But he also acts in a corporate way as a member of the body of Christ. All the believers in Christ Jesus are fellow members of the body of Christ, and are spoken of in Scripture as "the church." Human beings are added to the church daily as they come to faith in Jesus Christ. Paul writes about the church as to its origin, its nature and its operation in his epistle to the Ephesians. Ephesians is the classic epistle from Paul dealing with the church, the group of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. This epistle is evenly balanced with the first three chapters setting forth the principles of living in faith and the last three chapters setting forth the practices of living in faith. This follows in such logical order. First the doctrine, then the duty. Or it could be seen as first the evangel, and then the ethics of the Christian's life. Paul begins by recognizing that God began the whole process according to a plan that He had before creation. And so Paul writes:

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love (Ephesians 1:4).

God planned to bring all the believers to Himself as His children. For this reason Paul prayed for all believers that God would give them the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him that they might be blessed, that they might "know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe" (Ephesians 1:18-19).

Paul knew that God had regenerated the believers by exercising the very power with which He had raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10).

Paul wanted the believers to understand that in being born again they no longer had the limitations which they had in their carnal natures. There was no more reason why they should be alienated from each other as strangers and foreigners. Christ Jesus in His death at the cross took on Himself all that separated them from each other and now Paul writes:

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19).

As a matter of fact God was building all the believers together as Paul writes "for a habitation of God

through the Spirit." And this suggests to us immediately one of the functions of the church is that God is going to dwell in them.

Paul recognized that he had been given a special assignment. He was to teach all men that God would save Gentiles as well as saving Jews to be members of His body, the Church. And so Paul did not want anyone to be sorry for him because of any suffering that he incurred. He prayed that they would, as he wrote it,

. . . be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith . . . and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:16-19).

Because of this plan of God to have all believers to be members of the body of Christ, Paul urged them to exercise restraint and self-denial in their personal conduct so that they could all live together in peace. One thing is true about believers, just like human beings generally: they are not all alike. They differ from each other. And just because they are different, friction can arise. They get into each other's way. So Paul was very anxious that they should be careful how they acted toward each other. This was not possible in carnal behavior, but it would occur when the believers become mature in their spiritual growth.

To help them mature God would give certain believers special ability to guide others into growing into maturity. And so we read God "gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints" (Ephesians 4:11-12). And that means bringing the saints through to maturity and these people are assigned special duties in the body of Christ to help the others grow. "Till we all come in the unity of the faith . . . that we henceforth be no more children" (Ephesians 4:13-14). Each believer would help the others so that as Paul writes:

. . . the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Ephesians 4:16).

Because of these inter-body relationships, believer to believer in the group, believers would, as Paul writes, "walk not as other Gentiles walk" but would "put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt . . . and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man" (Ephesians 4:17-24).

Paul then urged believers to act out in their daily walk such conduct as would be inspired by the indwelling of Christ. And then he adds a very earnest word:

And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30).

Because the Spirit of God was given to them and the Spirit of God would be with them, their daily conduct would be right there in His presence. Paul urged the members of the church,

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us . . . (Ephesians 5:1-5).

After exhorting them to avoid evil conduct he wrote, "Walk as children of light."

Paul urged them to be filled with the Spirit and gave them guidance as to how they could do this.

But be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God (Ephesians 5:18-21).

"Speaking to yourselves in psalms and spiritual songs:" saturate your mind with the Old Testament Scriptures. "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father": be thankful in your daily life. "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God." Paul then gives specific instructions how this "submitting yourselves" would work out for several pairs of persons. "Wives" in chapter 5:22-24,

"husbands" 5:25-33, "children" 6:1-2, "fathers" 6:4, "servants" 6:5-8, and "masters" 6:9. The fact is that members of the church face a deadly persistent enemy. Satan tempted Jesus of Nazareth and he will certainly tempt believers in Christ. He can only be overcome by determined resistance. Now you will find that Paul writes a strong passage in chapter 6:10-18, as to how we can resist the devil that he should flee from us.

Chapter 54

The Joy Of The Lord

Paul lived his life in the earnest desire to serve God. As a young man he had tried to serve God by trying to stamp out any influence that Jesus of Nazareth might have made by His teaching before He was crucified. But then to his great shock and surprise the living Lord met him on the Damascus Road and definitely convicted him of his error. And then the Lord called him to a life of service. Paul tells about this in his testimony in court before King Agrippa.

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. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people and to the Gentiles (Acts 26:15-23).

He did this not only by his personal preaching and teaching, but also by his letter writing. In his epistle to the Philippians Paul expounded various aspects of the life in Christ that made it possible for the believers in Philippi to be blessed that they might be filled with joy. Apparently those believers were threatened with persecution. Yet the letter he wrote is known as the "joy epistle", because Paul refers so often and so much to the joy they could have in the Lord. The letter touches upon different aspects of what had happened and Paul points out how it was always in order that they should rejoice in the Lord.

Paul opens the letter by thanking God. "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you," because these believers had shared in his witness by supporting him with their gifts.

And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ (Philippians 1:9-10).

This emphasizes a function of love that is very profound. When love abounds yet more and more in knowledge and all judgment the soul is able to distinguish things that differ. That is an amazing thing, which is a way of saying if deep down in my heart I care only about myself, if I am not thoughtful of other people, I will not really understand the Gospel. I will never really understand the grace of God. It isn't until my heart is ready to respond according to God's grace and mercy in caring for other people, then I begin to be able to see and to understand.

Paul had suffered greatly but rejoiced that things had worked out to the furtherance of the Gospel. The fact that he has been near death did not bother him. Actually he would have been glad to die that he might be with the Lord, but he felt that he would probably be spared that he might help the believers in their own lives here. He knew the believers would suffer persecution even as he had. He urged them to stand united with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel.

For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake (Philippians 1:29).

Paul stressed that believers should be very careful to be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. "In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3). And "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (2:5). Paul pointed out that Christ really

gave up all His own benefits that He might effect the salvation of all who believed in Him. So Paul urged them,

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13).

We should note that believers should not work "for" their salvation, but rather work "out" their salvation because God has already worked in the grace of God.

Paul then noted two examples whom they could emulate, Timothy of whom he could say, "I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state" (Philippians 2:20) and Epaphroditus who almost worked himself to death to help Paul. But in addition to working as zealously as possible, Paul urged them, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord" putting no confidence in the flesh. If anyone could have trusted his flesh, Paul could have done so. He was born a Jew, brought up in godly fashion and trained to serve God. Then he writes: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ" (Philippians 3:7). And Paul intended to do this in every way. His personal ambition was, he writes,

That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead (Philippians 3:10-11).

I do not think that Paul meant here the resurrection of his body at Christ's return, but I think he was referring to his experiencing the fullness of spiritual conduct as over against carnal behavior. About this Paul would say,

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13-14).

Paul challenged believers to follow him. He admitted his manner of life was in heaven. He urged them to so stand fast in the Lord. "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice." And the Paul gave the believers a promise that has become classic for all believers:

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7).

We should note this closely. "Be careful for nothing." That is be worried, be unduly, overly exercised about nothing, "But in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving." I think when I was going over this I was struck again how often we are tempted to make our supplications without thanksgiving. I am surprised at myself how many times I come to the Lord, almost doubting Him, almost thinking to myself it will not do any good. Wait a minute. Let me give thanks for what He has done. "In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." You will remember how the Lord Jesus did this in Gethsemane. "Father if it be possible, let this cup pass from me that I drink it not, nevertheless not my will but thine be done."

We should note here in the latter part of this epistle in chapter 4:1 Paul wrote "So stand fast in the Lord." In verse 4 he wrote: "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice." May I emphasize to you that in this world there are not very many things you can rejoice about. In this world, if you are a sensitive person, there is trouble, trouble everywhere. Then how can you rejoice? By looking into the face of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I want to tell you if you will turn your heart and mind to God and look up into God's face, keep looking there, you will be surprised how He will share His joy with you. Again in verse 6: "Be careful for nothing . . . let your requests be made known unto God." And then verse 7: "And the peace of God . . . shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." And now finally notice in verse

8. This is a remarkable verse. I think perhaps because the verse is so long is why we do not memorize it more frequently, but let us look at it.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report: if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you (Philippians 4:8-9).

And then Paul says:

I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound . . . I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me . . . But I have all, and abound . . . My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:12-19).

And so to these people who were facing trouble and persecution the Apostle Paul who had been right in the midst of all the trouble and persecution that came to him could cry out before God, "Rejoicing in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice."

Chapter 55

Life In Christ

Living in Christ requires diligent exercise of faith and a constant increase of the knowledge of God and of His will. In his epistle to the Colossians Paul sets forth in detail admonition to guide the believers in Colossae that their life might be successful in Christ. From the time that Paul had heard of their faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which they had to all saints, and the hope which was laid up for them in heaven, Paul thanked God for them, "praying always for you."

. . . that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing (Colossians 1:9-10).

This means that they would be fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. It is very significant to note how the more you know about God, the more fruitful you can be in your life; and of course the other side of that would be true, the less you know about God, the less fruit there would be in your life. This the way Paul put it. He wanted that they might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that they might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing. This meant that they would be, as Paul put it, fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Paul knew that if those believers were going to increase in the knowledge of God, they would need to be "strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power" (Colossians 1:11) which God exercised in raising Jesus of Nazareth from the dead, that they might endure "unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness." Living in Christ is by no means easy. It requires above all else denial of self and for this the joy of the Lord must be our strength. The believer must be, as Paul wrote, "giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." The natural man could not possibly live in obedience to the will of God. In being born again the believer is delivered from the power of darkness even as he is translated "into the kingdom of the Son of His love." In this kingdom the believer has "redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

Paul then sets forth the exalted place given to Jesus Christ the Son of God. Paul writes He is "the image of the invisible God . . . by him were all things created . . . and he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church. . .that in all things he might have the pre-eminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven" (Colossians 1:15-20). And in this way Paul gives to the Lord Jesus Christ the most exalted place that is possible. He is at the very center and above all else.

The work of reconciliation extended to the believers who were "sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works." But now God is able to

. . . present you holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in his sight: if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel (Colossians 1:22-23).

That is the way Paul put it. Paul considered himself to have been a minister of the Gospel and now rejoiced in his sufferings for the believers, as he filled up, in his words

. . .that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church (Colossians 1:24).

In this connection Paul understood himself to have been made a minister of the mystery of the Gospel and he says about that:

. . . which is Christ in you, the hope of glory, whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom (Colossians 1:27-28).

Paul wished that the believers in Colossae could know what "great conflict I have for you . . . that their hearts might be comforted."

Paul is concerned that the believers might be led astray so he writes "And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words" (Colossians 2:4). Paul admonished them, as he writes,

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving (Colossians 2:6-7).

You can just feel Paul urging these people to come nearer, and closer and closer in their fellowship with the Lord. Paul knew the danger of being robbed of blessing in the Gospel was very real in the city of Colossae. He admonished the believers bluntly to be very careful. He writes, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit" (Colossians 2:8). Now that word "spoil" means "despoil." And you and I would say robbed. "Beware lest any man rob you through philosophy and vain deceit." Paul then went on to emphasize how complete their salvation was in Christ. And so Paul writes these words:

And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power . . . buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God . . . And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses (Colossians 2:10-13).

This is a marvelous description of the wonderful blessing that God pours out to believers.

Because their salvation was complete in Christ Himself Paul urged the believers to refuse to be intimidated by any critics of their faith. He says,

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy-day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels (Colossians 2:16-18).

Paul urged "Do not let any talkers from the outside turn you away from what you know about the Lord Jesus Christ. Keep your faith in Him." Paul urged them to remember that they were dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, even as they were now risen with Christ in the newness of life.

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

Then Paul went on with this discussion and urged them "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth" (Colossians 3:5). And to put off all carnal activities and to put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge.

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye (Colossians 3:12-13).

This is a great description of just the kind of life that the believer is to live.

And above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful {Colossians 3:14-15).

The Greek word that is translated "rule" is the same word that would be translated "umpire." "Let the peace of God umpire in your heart and be ye thankful." Then he goes on to say "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Paul urges them that is the way in which to do it.

More and more as we study in the Scripture, and we try to understand from Paul his insight into truth

of the life in Christ, more and more it dawns on us that you and I have not got it in ourselves. We are not strong enough. We are not smart enough. We are not good enough. "Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly" means keeping the heart and mind filled with the things that the Lord has said. Then Paul goes on to say "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17), that is, as inspired by Him.

Paul then gives terse admonitions to various classes of believers. And in this book we find he tells wives how they should do, husbands how they should do, children how they should do, fathers how they should do, servants how they should do and masters how they should do, very simply put and very much to the point. Then he sends personal greetings, closing his epistle by saying,

Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving . . . Walk in wisdom toward them that are without . . .
Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt (Colossians 4:26)

In this way Paul has set forth in his letter to the Colossians a description of the life in Christ which was theirs by the grace of God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 56

The Model Church

In his first epistle to the Thessalonians Paul describes aspects of a model church as being a congregation of believers in Christ that reflect all the aspects that would develop when everything would happen in a spiritual way, as led by the Holy Spirit. If you were to ask yourself what would a church look like if it would be as it ought to be, you should read I Thessalonians. In chapter 1 Paul sketches the evangelism as it would occur in a normal fashion. In chapter 2 Paul describes himself in his function as a model pastor, as a pastor who was doing the things that he ought to be doing, the way in which he ought to be doing them. In chapter 3:1-10 Paul described the faith which these believers manifested. And then in chapter 3:11 to chapter 4:12 Paul described the love which featured the experience of these believers. And then in chapter 4:13 to the end of chapter 5 Paul described the hope which they cherished in awaiting the coming of the Lord. Following this, after verse 11 in chapter 5, Paul admonished these believers as to how they should conduct themselves that they might glorify God in their personal lives.

No doubt there are times when the emphasis upon justification by faith seems to imply that the believers in Christ need not take any action whatever in committing themselves to Christ. But what Paul wrote in the first epistle of this book actually sounds quite different. For instance he writes, "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith." Now that is an interesting phrase. Just look at it. "Your work of faith." So many people have an idea that if you have faith, then there would not be anything at all about work. But James would tell you very plainly that if you have faith that amounts to anything, it will work. "Your work of faith, and labor of love." Love is not just a sensation that you have, a feeling that you have; it is something that you do.

Remembering without ceasing your work in faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God (I Thessalonians 1:3-4).

Apparently Paul had a clear memory of the evangelistic procedure which had won these believers to Christ. He wrote:

For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake (I Thessalonians 1:5).

This seems to imply that Paul's evangelism challenged and won open response which involved some persecution. Paul wrote:

And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in such affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost (I Thessalonians 1:6).

In fact these Thessalonian believers became "examples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia" and they were so widely talked about Paul said "so that we need not to speak any thing." These believers were reported to have turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and "to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come" (I Thessalonians 1:10).

In the second chapter Paul described his own procedure to show how he had been delivered to set forth his clear testimony. And so he wrote:

We were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. For our exhortation was not of deceit . . . but as we were allowed of God to be put in truth with the gospel, even so we speak . . . For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know . . . nor of men sought we glory (I Thessalonians 2:2-6).

But Paul had been gentle "even as a nurse cherisheth her children" and "being affectionately desirous of

you" Paul had been willing to "have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us" (I Thessalonians 2:7 -8). Paul thanked God that the Thessalonian believers had received Paul's presentation as the very Word of God and "became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus" (I Thessalonians 2:14).

This resulted in the Thessalonians being persecuted by the Gentiles even as the Judean Christians had been persecuted by the Jews. Paul had wanted to visit them to encourage them. "Even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us" (I Thessalonians 2:18). But he wanted to go because they were his glory and joy. Paul was so concerned about the spiritual welfare of the Thessalonians that he finally sent Timothy "to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith" (I Thessalonians 3:2). He reminded them that he had warned them of the persecution they must endure and so he had sent Timothy to check on conditions. Then he writes:

But now when Timothy came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity . . . therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith: for now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord. For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God (I Thessalonians 3:6-9).

Having been satisfied that their faith was strong, Paul prayed:

And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end he may stablish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints (I Thessalonians 3:12-13).

The next virtue in which Paul wanted the believers to abound was love toward one another.

For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that everyone of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor; not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: that no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified (I Thessalonians 4:3-6).

Paul did not feel it was necessary to write to them about brotherly love because they were taught of God to love one another. It is very interesting that the practical exercise of loving one another is really very simple. You know what it takes to love one another? Listen to Paul:

And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing (I Thessalonians 4:11-12).

You might say to me, "Well that is all depending on what I do." Exactly, and it is my attitude toward other people. Here again it can be felt that love in the New Testament is not so much a matter of emotion as it is a matter of honest interest in the welfare of another.

The third virtue that Paul described was hope. It is common for people to use the word "hope" when they really mean "wish." The Bible meaning of hope is confident expectation. You see in the Bible you only hope for what you know for sure is going to come to pass. It has not come to pass yet but you are expecting it, and that is why you use the word "hope." You do not mean "wish." When Paul speaks of hope, he means to refer to something he is confidently expecting to come to pass. The believer in Christ is confidently expecting to meet his Lord. Paul writes:

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (I Thessalonians 4:16-18).

Paul then discusses the manner of the Lord's coming as a thief in the night, but urges that the believers

need not be uneasy about that. Since they are of the day they need not fear any sudden calamity at the time of His coming:

Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober . . . For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ (I Thessalonians 5:6, 9).

The very fact that the Lord is coming back to judge and to establish His kingdom openly should inspire the believer to vigilant carefulness. And Paul wrote about that.

Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves (I Thessalonians 5:11-13).

Then Paul goes on through to the end of that chapter giving them various admonitions and instructions as to how they might live in such a way as to glorify God since He has reconciled them to Himself. He is keeping them now and will take them to Himself forever. In view of all that, how should the person live? This is what Paul writes about in the latter part of I Thessalonians.

Chapter 57

The Second Coming

In the short epistle of II Thessalonians Paul reveals much that is involved in the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. To begin with the Lord is coming back in person. I can remember many years ago when I first began preaching and I felt that because I was responsible for what was being preached in that particular church I should seek to give the people a full round of the Gospel truth. And so in checking on the Scriptures and going by them it came to me that somewhere in what I was preaching, I should tell about the second coming. I had not made much study of it and did not feel I knew much about it, but I knew some things about it and I put them together and presented a message. I remember afterwards that a certain person came to me in great distress. She felt that I had definitely let her down. She had trusted me so. She felt that I had the Scriptures clear in my mind, and the Gospel in my heart, and that she could depend on what I said, and now I went and ruined everything. I could not make out what in the world she was talking about. I said, "What is the matter?" She said, "You said that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming back." And I said, "Well isn't He?" So she told me that her mother had told her that when she died the Lord Jesus would come to take her and that was the second coming of the Lord.

It was a surprise to me that anybody who took the Bible as true, and read the Bible, and read the New Testament would not know that the New Testament clearly says that Jesus of Nazareth is coming back in person. At His first coming as a Babe in Bethlehem there was much that needed to be interpreted, identified, and proclaimed. After all He was born as a baby as other children are born and He lived in His home with Mary and Joseph. He came in the form of a man, as I say He was born as a baby and lived for about thirty years as a member of a family. When He was arrested by the Roman soldiers, he was treated as a common criminal. People needed to be told and then they had to believe that this was the Christ, all of which would be hard to do. But Paul revealed that the second coming will be quite different.

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day (II Thessalonians 1:7-10).

This is the way Paul puts it. It is obvious that the second coming will be visible. In fact it will be after the fashion of a catastrophe. Jesus' first coming was gentle as starlight, so the second will be violent. Angels accompanied each event. In the first advent the angels announced "Peace on earth to men and good will," but in the second coming there will be everlasting destruction brought upon them that know not God and that obey not the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Since the time of the second coming is unknown and since Jesus of Nazareth urged His followers to be ready for His coming at any time, like a thief in the night, it was natural for the disciple to anticipate His coming as a sudden event. But Paul reveals a corrective here.

That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition (II Thessalonians 2:2-3).

At this point Paul introduces a person who remains obscure in Scripture, calling him "that man of sin, the son of perdition." Apparently Paul had taught the Thessalonians about this coming but we have no Scripture extant, no Scripture at hand, that will help us to identify him. Sometimes the title "anti-christ" is given to this being but Scripture references are not clear. John in his first epistle indicates that there will be many anti-christs, even as there were some present in that time when John wrote his epistles.

Even though the reference is obscure it seems definite enough. Some fulfillment of prophecy must take place before the second coming of the Lord.

Throughout the history of the church earnest students have speculated whether the conditions were being fulfilled, but the evidence seem still to be lacking that this person has come of whom Paul says,

Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God (II Thessalonians 2:4).

Another obscure element is mentioned by Paul in his letter as the mystery of iniquity which Paul indicates is already working. "Only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way" (II Thessalonians 2:7). The old English term "let" indicates some sort of restraining influence which will eventually be removed. So we read in Paul's writing:

And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish (II Thessalonians 2:8-10).

This is the way Paul put it. Despite the obscurity of this passage, there seems no doubt that dire events are to take place toward the end of this age and be related to the second coming of the Lord.

Even more sobering predictions are set forth by Paul that introduce an aspect of the will of God that is hard to accept. We read:

Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (II Thessalonians 2:10-12).

Isn't that a strong and sobering word? This reminds one of that sober word in Hebrews, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God." The Scripture reveals that God is not mocked and it seems so here in corroboration of this sobering truth. Despite the grace of God, which has prompted God to be kind and generous, man is just so incorrigible that there will be some souls lost despite all that Christ has done. And so Paul finds it necessary to write sternly about some who take advantage of the goodness of God.

There will be some who walk disorderly by taking advantage of the kindness of God, and Paul draws the line of tolerance concerning these. He says,

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us (II Thessalonians 3:6).

Apparently this disorder took the form of men refusing to work while counting on sharing what the others had produced. Paul made short shrift of such when he wrote:

For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies (II Thessalonians 3:10-11).

Even though they had carried out their own foolish conduct so far, Paul sought to guide them. "Now them that are such," these people who are busybodies, who are doing nothing, "we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing" (II Thessalonians 3:12-13). Something of the clinging love of the believer's heart for his brethren can be felt in Paul's final word when he writes:

And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother (II Thessalonians 3:14-15).

One can only be amazed at this wonderful grace that was shown in Paul's attitude and which comes from the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a very disturbing line of thought to feel that when all is said and done, after Christ has suffered and died, has sent His Holy Spirit to guide, and after He has interceded and prayed, there are still some people whose sin is such that they will continue to do the things that they personally want to do even though it is not in the will of God. Paul wrote saying that when the Lord Jesus returns in person, as He will, the day of judgment will be here. But he ends his epistle with these gracious words: "Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all."

Chapter 58

The Young Minister

Among the letters by Paul the apostle which we have in the New Testament there were three written to young ministers, I Timothy, II Timothy and Titus. We can learn much about the life in Christ by noting what Paul emphasizes as he wrote words of advice to these young ministers of the Gospel. I Timothy is perhaps the most comprehensive in its subject matter so far as Paul's discussion is concerned. The whole tone of this letter is one of admonition. Paul discusses with Timothy at least three major areas: first, the content of his preaching, and second, his personal attitude as he ministered the Gospel to his hearers, and third, his personal conduct as pastor.

Paul wanted Timothy to give direction to others who were teaching the Gospel saying.

As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do (I Timothy 1:3-4).

Even in those days there were teachers who sought to embellish their teaching, to make it more attractive, by bringing in stories that they would offer to help the understanding. And there were those who undertook to explain apparent differences in the several genealogies found in Scripture. Such discussions could never settle any questions, but actually would only bring in new questions.

Paul urged that Timothy should keep in mind the real purpose of all preaching was to affect the heart attitude of the believers. He writes:

Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned (I Timothy 1:5).

Charity would come from "Christ in you, the hope of glory." We would never have that in ourselves. We could not exercise ourselves in charity to other people, not in our own strength, but "Christ in you, the hope of glory" makes it possible. The only way there could be a pure heart would be to have a purified heart, and the only way to have a good conscience would be to have the conscience cleansed from dead works by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Gospel preaching would bring the soul to God through Calvary's cross, and then fill the heart with the love of God through the Holy Spirit working within. The minister of the Gospel should aim at producing these results in his hearers.

Timothy had the responsibility of supervision over other ministers and teachers, and Paul urged him to emphasize the importance of presenting a clear message of the Gospel. And he wrote to Timothy:

If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained (I Timothy 4:6).

Timothy was to charge the preachers and the teachers to be very careful to set forth the true Gospel. "And these things give in charge, that they may be blameless" (I Timothy 5:7). Paul was anxious that Timothy might "war a good warfare; holding faith, and a good conscience" (I Timothy 1:18-19). Paul recognized the danger of professing faith while not living acceptably to God. Several leaders had made shipwreck in just this way; they had put away their consciences in their conduct. Paul wrote this letter to Timothy by way of guiding him in his pastoral work. "That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God" (I Timothy 3:15). He felt that consistent procedures followed by a pastor have important affect upon the people in the congregation.

In the course of this letter Paul touched on various aspects of personal behavior in which Timothy could impress Gospel truth upon those who watched him. He urged Timothy with these words: "exercise thyself rather unto godliness" (I Timothy 4:7). And again "Be thou an example of the believers, in word,

in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (I Timothy 4:12). That is quite a list. Just think, this young man going out to be a minister was to be an example in word, careful of what he says; in conversation, that means manner of life, in the lifestyle; in charity, the way he exercised himself toward other people; in spirit, the way he thought about God and about everything; in faith, the way in which he trusted the Word of God; in purity, the way in which he gave himself one hundred percent in response to the grace of God. And in all these things Timothy was to be an example. Paul emphasized that Timothy should nurture his own faith and understanding and so Paul urged Timothy,

Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery (I Timothy 4:13-14).

It is not enough that a man undertake to be a minister; he should follow through with practical procedures to strengthen his own faith. So Paul wrote to Timothy,

Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee (I Timothy 4:15-16).

The more the preacher understands the Gospel, the more the people get out of it. This emphasizes the importance of a minister's personal faith and of his consistent conduct.

In all his pastoral work Timothy was to act impartially, treating everybody alike, and in all personal contacts he was to maintain a godly testimony. So Paul wrote:

But thou, O man of God . . . follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness (I Timothy 6:11).

Now these are the objectives. These are the things the young minister should have in mind. This is what he should be seeking to do. "Follow after", pursue this, try to get hold of, "righteousness", according to the word of God, in the will of God. "Godliness" the very way in which he would do and the very way in which he would talk, the very way in which he would act, people would get the impression of the reality of God. "Faith" the minister's own personal faith, "love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight." All those words are the things that Timothy was to follow after. They are also gentle and they are so unselfish and Timothy was to arrive at these quiet, peaceful, meek aspects by fighting the good fight of faith. Apparently the work of the minister would present a constant challenge. Paul closed his letter in an urgent admonition:

O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called (I Timothy 6:20).

"Profane" would be secular discussion that would belong in the market place. The man in the pulpit should declare the Word of God. I have always been struck with the fact that Paul even commented on that back in his time, "science falsely so called." We have so many things labeled scientific, which have no science in them at all, they are only derived from that.

The first thing that Paul urged Timothy to promote among believers was prayer. I think this is remarkable.

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

That is an amazing thing, "for all men." He emphasized that God was interested in the salvation of all men. "I will therefore that all men pray everywhere." It is interesting to note that he places the personal testimony of women on the same level of importance saying "in like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel . . . with good works" (I Timothy 2:9-10). In this letter Paul sets forth

specific attributes that should be seen in the conduct of the bishop and of the deacon. In each case the man's family testimony was involved. Even at that time in the history of the early church there were those who were introducing strange doctrines as to the conduct of believers. Paul warned Timothy to be careful to abide by what was true to the Gospel that he had received. Timothy was charged to administer congregational affairs without respect to personal feelings. He gave Timothy specific items based on general principles and urged Timothy to respect elders who served well.

Chapter 59

The Latter Days

Paul's second letter to Timothy is generally considered to be the last letter that he wrote of the epistles that we have in the New Testament. In it we find many items of emphases which enable us to grasp what Paul had in mind that any minister of the Gospel should know and do. He began the letter by reminding Timothy of his practice of praying for Timothy.

Without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day; greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy (II Timothy 1:3-4).

Paul reminded Timothy of the origin of Timothy's faith through his family. This is a very significant example of the experience of many believers amongst us today.

When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also (II Timothy 1:5).

This is a classic description of the origin of the faith of many persons today who have had believing parents and grandparents. Paul urged Timothy to "stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands" (II Timothy 1:6). But it seems clear even as you read it that a minister can do something about keeping his own attitude worthy of his task. In this connection Paul urged Timothy to identify himself publicly with the Gospel as Paul preached it, even though it might bring persecution upon him. Paul wrote.

Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God (II Timothy 1:8).

Paul kept in mind his own commission from the Lord and what it involved for him. He wrote:

Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For the which cause I also suffer these things (II Timothy 1:11-12).

Paul understood that there was a very direct relationship between the call that he had, the service that he was rendering and the suffering that was his.

When he wrote this letter Paul was in prison facing trial, but he was not disturbed even though he doubted as to what would happen to him personally. You know, to understand Paul one has to understand that Paul was not greatly concerned about whether he would stay in this world. This really did not primarily concern Paul. What primarily concerned Paul was that he would stay with the Lord. That was the big thing and I think that we ought to bring that up to ourselves in our day and time. I think that we are very much inclined in our human way to pick up from society round about us an over emphasis upon living in this world. Life in this world is treated as if it was something sacred. Well it is, but it is passing. It is not going to last. You are going to give it up. I will tell you that eternal life is also sacred and that is something that you and I want. When he wrote: "Nevertheless I am not ashamed," he meant "I do not stumble at this point. This does not trouble me." So he says, "Nevertheless I am not ashamed (I am not upset, I do not have any difficulties about my trouble and my situation) for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (II Timothy 1:12). Paul's confidence was not in that he was going to live here in this world all the time, that everything was going to be pretty and lovely, but his confidence was in the fact that he would be with the Lord.

There is no special doctrine or problem discussed in this letter. Paul was writing to a young minister to guide him into fruitful activity. The letter presents a series of imperatives which point to important actions

which Timothy could do to advantage. This would not be everything that Timothy would do, but these things Timothy could do. We read in verse 13, chapter 1, "Hold fast the form of sound words." It is a very important thing in reading the Bible to get the words of the Bible in mind. Again he said to Timothy: "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (II Timothy 2:1). Timothy was not to be strong in sophisticated doctrinal formulations. Timothy was not to find his strength because he was smart, and was capable and able to argue, nor in personal virtue or ability, but in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ (II Timothy 2:3).

Living in the Lord will not be easy. Paul explains that a soldier at war does not involve himself in community affairs, even so a soldier of Jesus Christ does not involve himself in earthly concerns.

Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel (II Timothy 2:7-8).

The minister of the Gospel must always keep in mind that the resurrection is the turning point in all the work of Christ. The minister does not attempt to advise his flock how they could improve or how they could do better. He must share with his people the fact that the living Lord, working in them, will guide them and make them do the will of God by the grace of God. Salvation is not our achievement because we are that smart or because we are that good or because we are that noble or because we are that wise. Salvation is simply not our achievement. We do not do it. It is the work of God.

It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself. Of these things put them in remembrance (II Timothy 2:11-14).

This is what Timothy was to preach. It is so natural to think that serving the Lord as a believer is a present personal assignment forgetting that our whole experience involves the living God. "Study to show thyself approved unto God...rightly dividing the word of truth" (II Timothy 2:15). This is one of the famous sentences in the new Testament. But you know that "rightly dividing the word of truth" can easily be misunderstood. You would think that you were dividing it like you would chop out a puzzle, perhaps, in pieces. That is not the meaning of "dividing the word of truth." It is dividing the word of truth the way a ship divides the waters, holding a straight course through the word of truth as a ship at sea. Get the whole picture in mind and look at the basic principle and go by that.

Paul goes on to say, "But shun profane and vain babblings" (II Timothy 2:16). The word "profane" means not sacred, that is, secular. It does not mean that the person uses profanity, it means that he is just talking about things that leave God out. Then Paul has a personal word for Timothy.

Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart (II Timothy 2:22).

Such personal conduct by the minister matters "But foolish and unlearned questions avoid" (II Timothy 2:23). To be foolish a question leaves out God To be unlearned a question must be unrelated to Scripture. Much discussion can be developed in human social, economic approaches. A minister would be wise to stay out of such discussions.

And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves (II Timothy 2:24-25).

Then Paul goes on to say "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come" (II Timothy 3:1). The minister should be aware that the course of evil will grow and spread with ever increasing threat to everybody but especially to believers in Christ. There will be development of personal degeneration which will be manifested in the home, in the community and among the believers. This is an unusually apt description of the facts that are operative in the present time. In II Timothy 3:1-9, every minister should

realize the sinister character for such developments.

But continue thou in the things which thou has learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable For doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (II Timothy 3:14-17).

That word "perfect" means "complete."

And then in the 4th chapter he concludes his message to Timothy saying to him,

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine . . . But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry (II Timothy 4:1-5).

The remainder of the epistle is given over to personal greeting. And this shows how Paul esteemed and cherished the fellowship of fellow believers.

Chapter 60

Pastoral Care

The prevailing impression about the experience of a true believer in Christ seems to be that the important aspect is what he believes. This seems to be the consequences of preoccupation with controversies about doctrine. That is so often what the church gets excited about, what a person says about this and says about that, what he says that he believes and what someone else say he believes. With so much time and emphasis given to discussion of what is believed, it is natural to assume that this is the most important, most significant aspect of the Gospel. Paul's letter to Titus presents a corrective to this view, inasmuch as Paul stressed to Titus that the important aspect of the experience of a true believer is his conduct. Soundness of the faith of a believer is not so much a matter of what he believes as it is a matter of how he lives.

In his salutation to Titus, Paul identified himself as "a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness" (Titus 1:1). The distinguishing aspect of the truth to which Paul was committed was that it "is after godliness." Throughout this letter Paul stresses again and again the supreme importance of acceptable conduct on the part of the believer in Christ.

Paul begins his admonition to Titus by reminding him that Paul had left Titus in Crete, that he might supervise the establishing of order in the groups of believers by the ordaining of elders in every city. When Paul described the men who should be the authorized leaders in the church he stressed their conduct, not just their doctrine. For instance we read:

If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly, For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught {Titus 1:6-9}

Not until the last phrase was any reference made to what the man believes. All of it is a description of how he lived. This was particularly important because of the presence of many in the area who were disturbing the believers. Paul wrote:

For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake (Titus 1:10-11).

Paul then makes the comment that implies the culture of a community may actually affect the spiritual health of the people. It is the only place in the New Testament where any comment is made about the social characteristics of any local region. We may note that Paul does not make this observation about the people in Crete as from his own judgment, but he quotes one of the local preachers. The is what Paul says:

One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in faith (Titus 1:12-13)

This implies that because they lived in that part of the country, they needed special treatment.

When Paul goes on to comment at this point he seems to make it clear that the evidence of the unsoundness of this false teaching was to be noted in the conduct of these false teachers. Paul wrote:

They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate (Titus 1:16).

Paul then urged Titus to instruct the believers in the things which become sound doctrine. It is noticeable that his emphasis was plainly upon their conduct.

But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: that the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children. to be discreet. chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded (Titus 2:1-6).

In that whole passage when Paul was describing the things which become sound doctrine, you will notice not a word about what they believe, it is how they live!

Paul admonished Titus "In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works" (Titus 2:7). Then he went on to stress that such good works, in the case of Titus, would be demonstrated

. . . in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you (Titus 2:7-8).

In other words Titus was to conduct himself in his preaching and teaching in such a manner that even his rivals could find no fault with him. Now that would be on the basis of his conduct, and of the way he went about things.

The emphasis upon godly conduct was continued by Paul as he admonished servants to conduct themselves in such a way that they could "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." At this point Paul summarized the basic thrust of the Gospel. It is so very important to notice in Titus what Paul has to say:

Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; not purloining, but showing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ (Titus 2:9-13).

Paul admonished Titus "These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee" (Titus 2:15). He wanted Titus to present a stout witness to the truth which Paul had just expressed.

Then Paul went on to say, "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work" (Titus 3:1). No doubt some of the public officials would be pagans. It would be quite possible that in many cases the believer in Christ might know even better than the civic official what should be done, but Paul urged Titus" to encourage the believers to conduct themselves in such a manner as to win the appreciation of the community. Paul reminded Titus that he, Paul himself, had lived with malice and hate in his heart but that he had been changed by the manifestation of the grace of God in the Gospel. Paul put the whole emphasis of his thought in one simple statement writing:

This is a faithful saying, and these thing I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men (Titus 3:8).

Despite his goodwill toward all men, Paul instructed Titus to "Avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain" (Titus 3:9). And he gave Titus definite guidance to reject any who show that they are incorrigible. He repeated a final word as if to make sure that Titus understood. He writes:

And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful (Titus 3:14).

This then, as Paul would set it out to Titus, was the doctrine according to godliness.