

Plain Talk on Spiritual Living

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Chapter 1

Dominion And Obedience

To understand spiritual living in this world, it is essential to keep in mind the two worlds: the invisible and the visible. We read in Hebrews:

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear (Hebrews 11:3).

Not only are there these two worlds, but the unseen world is greater than, and actually controls the seen world, the visible world. Yet the visible world is the place where the great event of living and its problems take place. If we are ever going to live victoriously, it must be here in this world.

When man was created, he was placed in charge of the natural world. Adam was placed in the garden of Eden and told "to dress it and to keep it." This would challenge and exercise his capacities of intelligence. He would have to know what to do if he were going to take care of it in this way. He would have to learn what to do. The natural world in its inanimate form is neutral in itself. It can be used for good, and it can be used for evil. So far as things are concerned they do not have any sense of their own. So far as the natural world is concerned, it is neutral. I can make out of it what I want to make out of it within the limits of my ability.

Man is free to handle the natural world as it is. His own flesh is made of the dust of the ground. Thus in having dominion over the natural world, a man should have dominion over his own physical body. That is part dust, too. Therefore, he should control it. The situation he is in challenges man not only to control the natural world around him, but also that part of the natural world that is in himself, namely, his own body. Man's body lives by taking in part of the environment. I want to speak very simply at this point. We are trying to understand about living, and we start in at the very beginning. We have our bodies as we begin living. My body is made of dust, but it is not any specific amount of dust! My body is changing all the time. It comes and goes. I take food in, and I cast it off. The design of nature is that when I need a new supply I hunger. When I am hungry, I reach out into the natural world around me and take food. Eating the food satisfies my hunger, but it is also pleasant. Food can be desirable, and soon I develop an appetite. I want to eat not because I am hungry, but because I like to eat for the sake of eating.

What man needs for his existence, his living, is in his environment; but it is not always ready for his use. Even the food that he wants is not always available in that form. Thus he is put into the garden to dress it and to keep it. This means that he is to work on it. It is true that man lives by bread; but he has to cultivate the soil to raise the wheat to make the bread. It may even be true that he may eat fish, but he has to go out and catch them. Actually, so far as the world is concerned, these items, these elements are round about; but they have to be handled. In the world man is to exercise his intelligence, to produce more food and to prepare it for his use.

As we are thinking of these things, man needs to be with other people. The other people are all around him. Some are to be his friends. Contact with other people can be very pleasant and you could be led by your desires of pleasure to deal with other people in one way or another. You will always find that your pleasures are involved with these other people. The babe with the mother, the husband with the wife, the person in the family, the man in the neighborhood – all these suggest desirable relationships. Yet in

all of these a person must use his intelligence. I will not take time now to dwell upon this, but any one of these things can be mishandled; and any one of these things can be the source of misery and trouble. They all will respond to intelligent conduct, intelligent handling.

Man is in a universe where God is. Man's relationship with other men are involved with keeping him contented; and man's relationship with the world at large, the natural world, is involved with keeping him well fed and happy. In that sense man is in relationship with God. His relationship with God can be very pleasant. We may need to read about it in other people's lives, but the actual fact is the testimony has been given that fellowship with God can be the source of unspeakable joy. One thing we know for sure is that people who have no fellowship with God do not have any joy. What little happiness or pleasure they develop for themselves in one way or another in following their own desires is very short lived. Real, true joy comes in knowing God. Here too, however, man must exercise his intelligence. God is all around him, but man must know Him. What is potential in your fellowship with God, what is possible in your relationship with God must be "taken." In fact it can be cultivated.

Thus we can see a basic truth about spiritual living. Like all living it takes place here. Living deals with things as they are. Spiritual living deals with God as He is! There are pleasures and joys to be had, in this world and in living with God.

Sin is a factor that complicates the situation. By letting man begin to think and to do independently of God, man falls into sin; so that the disposition to seek and to do in line with his immediate pleasures prevails in the natural man. Only when man has been delivered from sin will he be free to handle successfully the natural world in which he is an integral part.

The issue is an inner problem, because the matter is a question of self-denial. The goal is to be able, so far as this world is concerned, to take it or to leave it. No one is really fit to have any kind of joy or pleasure unless he can deny himself of it. If I have to have something, it possesses me. If I am in a situation where I have just got to do something, I am not my own boss anymore. The matter of having dominion is foiled. In other words, I do not really have dominion. When you find somebody who just "has to" do this and just "has to" do that, you can put it down for yourself that that person will never enjoy spiritual living. In order to be able to really live, one has to pass through the experience of realizing that he is ready to die. This whole problem was dramatically set forth in Gethsemane where Jesus of Nazareth faced the supreme test and answered it this way. "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39).

This leads us to look at the other side of the coin in this basic situation. Man is in this world but under God. The idea of man being free to do as he pleases is simply not valid. This is the only world we know, that is so far as we are concerned. And in this world is "*God.*"

In God Himself there is obedience to the Father on the part of the Son: "I do always the things that please my Father." The Father could and did say about His Son "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him." Thus an elemental aspect in godly living, spiritual living, is total surrender to God the Father.

Jesus of Nazareth never faced the question of "surrender." He always wanted to do His Father's will. But human beings, children of Adam, face this matter as a real problem. Man is naturally interested in himself. All values originate in himself and his preferences are his own choices.

To guide this aspect of man's potential being, the "separated portion" was presented to man. Something that appealed in all aspects to man was placed within his reach and he was given a simple, plain command: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die"

(Genesis 2:16-17).

Thus the whole issue of obedience is involved in this one simple incident. "The tree was desirable to look upon, it was good for food, and to be desired to make one wise"; but "God said, Do not eat thereof." The issue is clear. Obedience is the key to the blessing of God.

Chapter 2

Love And Honor

Living goes on in the world of "others." Although the living entity is an individual, unique, distinct, in himself; there is no such thing as living alone. In this world in which we are, into which we were born, in which man was created, there is no such thing as any person, any individual, living alone. Being in solitary confinement is as unnatural as being a fish out of water. Even the physical being is not in isolation. Food to eat, water to drink, air to breathe, clothing and shelter are all in the environment, and must be appropriated that the individual can live. What is true physically, is also true socially and spiritually.

"It is not good for man to be alone." This statement goes beyond man's dependence upon man's environment for the raw material he needs to live. It points to the truth that man needs to be in fellowship with other human beings, equal to him, that he might achieve his potential, what he could be. To put it simply, man needs to have relationships with other men to be what he can be, to be normal. Is that simple enough for us all to have in mind? How very significant it is!

The existence of other human beings with whom man must live in relationships sets up the problem that he faces. It is characteristic of the individual to develop his own ego. That comes naturally. Just as he is one entity, a single unit of being, in growing he develops as an individual aware of himself. Everything he senses in the universe is identified in terms of how it is related to himself. Early in his career he demonstrates that "self preservation is the first law of nature." We would do very well to remember that that is nature. Later we will note that that is not grace, that is not mercy.

In the Genesis account, the creation of man is a matter of record. The first two individuals in the world were actually one in origin. The woman was created by being taken out of the man. She was brought into the man's life as his equal, to help him live. This helping would be done as the two blended into one operational unit. Are you following me? They are to be together. They are to be like one. Marriage becomes the basic human relationship, and the home becomes the primal human situation. We may note in passing that entering into marriage involves the surrender of individual autonomy (living as I please, doing my own way) for the richer possibilities of mutuality (being together with) under the blessing of God.

When sin entered into the world it took the form of self-centeredness. Because of sin man became disobedient to God, in doing what he (man) wanted to do instead of doing what God commanded him to do. Jesus of Nazareth taught that to keep the commandments of God is to love God. He also taught that the first great commandment is "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." Thus in promoting godly living, the first emphasis is upon obedience.

The second sin described in the Bible is that of Cain, who killed his brother. This is the very opposite of the will of God who would have all men to love their neighbors. Here again the issue is clear. Godly living will be featured by respect for others: for those in authority, consideration for all equals, and charity toward the poor. The regenerated believer is a new creature of God, and is a child of God. The Holy Spirit within him will activate in him the will of the Lord Jesus Christ who will completely obey the will of His Father with joy.

The truth in this second great commandment is vividly revealed in the sin of Ham. When he came upon his father lying naked in his tent, he told his brothers about it. His action can be best understood when the conduct of Shem and Japheth is noted. When they heard what condition their father was in,

they took a garment, walked in backwards so that they would not look upon their father's nakedness and covered him and thus they demonstrated their respect and their love for their father.

The judgment of God pronounced upon Ham by Noah, his father, is a clear indication of the consequences of Ham's sin. Ham had manifested in the first place lack of respect which is a major blemish, and then he had shown lack of compassion which is a fatal flaw in his conduct. We have been pointing out so far that the revelation from God would show that so far as the human being on earth is concerned, God being real, man must have a certain attitude toward God. And because other men are real around him, man must have a certain attitude toward other men. In himself he will be inclined to be selfish. That is sinful. He will want to take care of himself and look after himself. That is sinful. God has revealed at the very beginning of Scripture that what God wants from man toward God is obedience. He wants man to obey the law of God. Keeping the commandments of God is actually loving God.

I have left out the phrase "loving God" until now in the discussion because I shrink from leaving the impression that what the heart is supposed to have is some emotional, affectional attitude toward God. That comes later. But at first what the human being can become aware of is that he is living in a world that he did not make, and he is depending upon environment that he did not and could not prepare. Everything around him that sustains man makes him dependent upon God. God wants man to appreciate that fact. God wants anybody living on the face of the earth to realize that he depends upon God for everything. Therefore a proper attitude to God will be to keep His commandments, which is to say "to love God." That is what that means.

In the second place, this human being is living in the presence of other people. They are all around him. He must have them. He must have these other people in order to be normal, in order to be natural. What attitude should he have toward them? Naturally (I mean originally, when he is born as a baby) the first attitude man has toward other people is that they are for his use. The baby tries to make everybody do what the baby wants. That is because it is just a baby. It has not learned about living yet. Certainly it has not learned about God's way of doing things. God's way of doing things about other people is to consider them. As has been noted about attitudes toward others: there are those that are above you, respect them; there are those equal to you, consider them; there are people not as well off as you are, be charitable. This is the very essence of the will of God with reference to anybody living in this world.

The lessons of godly living seem to be demonstrated in a negative way by the careers of Cain and of Ham: Cain, who killed his brother; and Ham, who had no respect for his father. In a negative way the record shows what ought not to be among men.

Love toward all men: honor toward those in authority, consideration for equals, and kindness to the poor, will always feature the living of any man who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. This is bringing into actual performance the truth of "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Chapter 3

Faith

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

This agrees with another passage of Scripture:

Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness (Romans 4:3).

Faith is the operating principle in man that results in godly living. It involves an exercise of judgment and of will, in which a person acts in response to what he believes. As used in the Bible, "faith" seems to indicate a personal response to some utterance, some word. We speak of "trusting" when we have in mind a certain confidence and an assurance about any person or anything. But the word "believe" seems to indicate a response to some spoken, uttered, or implied, word of promise. The meaning seems to be that the idea that was expressed in so many words in the promise that something would follow or result in the event that you do this or that, has been received in your consciousness; and you have responded with certain definite action in line with the idea. In such a case it would mean that you had responded as you did because you accepted that idea which had been communicated to you as being true or valid. It could then be said that you "believed" the idea which you had received. "Faith" is the noun, and "believing" is the verb that indicates your response.

Illustrations in Scripture are plentiful. For instance we read in Hebrews:

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house (Hebrews 11:7).

The idea had been communicated to Noah that certain destruction upon mankind in the form of a flood was due to come: Noah accepted this communication as true. It had not yet started to rain, but he had gotten this word. Because he accepted that word as true, he expected that the flood would come. He prepared his ark before it began to rain, because he accepted the warning that he had received as true. This is what it means to believe what you have been told.

In Luke 5:3-11 Jesus of Nazareth said to Peter "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught." He was to go out and to get a net full of fish. Peter did not think this was a practical suggestion. You will remember Peter was a fisherman. Anybody telling a fisherman how to fish and when to fish could expect that his words would be reviewed and thought over by the fisherman. Peter did not think that it was a practical suggestion to go out there and try to catch any fish, since Peter and his fellow workers had already been fishing all night without any success. I think in our day and time and amongst us we would have said the fish were not running that night. But Peter accepted the idea of that command as being valid for him. Do you notice just what I said? He did not think the procedure would do any good, but he accepted the fact that the command came from Jesus of Nazareth, and so he considered that that was valid for him. His response in letting down his nets was not so much because of any hope he had about the outcome. This did not imply that Peter believed he was doing a wise thing. He acted as he did because of the origin of the command. This can be felt in his very words: "Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." That is to say: "Not because I think it is the right

thing to do, or that I think it is the smart thing to do; and not that I think we are going to catch any fish, but because you say so, I will do it."

There is a wonderful insight in this for you and for me. We may have some word from God to us about something that we cannot see how it can possibly come to pass. We should now say to each other: "Wait a minute, brother, wait a minute. Did the Lord say so? Then accept it." Let us join Peter in saying, "Nevertheless, at thy Word (if you say so) I will let down the net." Peter's action was an act of "believing." He was not believing that his action would catch fish: he was believing that the action he took was what the Lord told him to do. It was an act of "believing," that is, he took the command as valid guidance because of the Person Who gave it. Even though it was quite possible he had no personal expectation of results.

A person could hear preaching today in which he might be told that if he accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior, he would be forgiven his sins. He could say he did not see how that could be possible. But that would not change the facts at all. He had been told the truth. "Whosoever believeth in me shall not perish." No explanation need be given. The promise of God would sustain it.

Peter's action was an act of believing; that is, he took the command from the Lord as valid guidance because of the Person, the Lord, Who gave it; even though it is quite possible Peter had no personal expectation of results. How can I think that? When Peter did bring the fish in, he was astonished. He was surprised, and he was smitten deeply. He went to the Lord and fell on his knees before Him and admitted that he was not worthy of Him. He had doubted that anything like that would happen.

This is similar to the case of Abraham as recorded in Hebrews:

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went (Hebrews 11:8).

The obedience of Abraham was in his believing. He believed what he had been told to do. He accepted it as valid and proper, and went and did it; even though he did not know where he was going. The obedience in the believing was not based on supporting conjectures of feasibility and possibility that things would likely work out all right. No, Abraham's obedience was based on the One Who gave the command. This is very important for you and for me.

It should be kept in mind that "believing" does not make anything come to pass. God makes things come to pass, but "believing" brings the believer in line to share in the event when it does happen. Although "believing" reaches beyond the limits of human understanding to lay hold of that which the person can neither ask nor think, it does have an actual history. Believing does not come out of the blue. Paul comments:

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17).

Let me pause here for a moment. There may yet be some one person to whom I should say something further. A person cannot just snap his fingers and believe. He cannot just say "Well, okay, I believe." It is not that simple. A person needs to know what it is that he believes and he needs to know from whom he heard it. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10: 17). This points to a very important truth. Faith is a matter of acting in line with some word of God. It follows obviously that to have faith a person must know or have some promise of God. If I am going to believe God's Word, I must know what the Word is. I will have to have some promise to God. How can any human being ever know what God has promised to do? By reading and studying the Word of God, the

Scriptures. So we are brought right back to the Bible. It is in this book that we have the promises of God. This truth gives richer meaning to the Word we read in Ephesians:

. . . alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them . . . (Ephesians 4:18)

How often today is this so sadly true! People are alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them. This does not mean ignorance of physics, nor ignorance of finances. This is not ignorance of philosophy. This means ignorance of the Bible: ignorance of the Word of God.

The relation of the promises of God to the spiritual living of the believer is to be seen in this word written by Peter in his second epistle:

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature. . . . (II Peter 1:4)

By the promises of God a believer can be a partaker of the divine nature. This obviously means to say that if a person does not have the promises of God, he does not have spiritual living. If a person does have the promises, he can have it. "To believe" means not only to have an attitude of trust, a mood of credulity, that a person would be willing to believe God; but it includes some action in line with the promise being claimed.

James spells out this whole truth in James 2:14-26. James has no question about the truth that faith is the operating principle that produces salvation, but he insists that faith leads into action which completes faith; making it "perfect." Thus he points out in so many words that while it is true "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness" (James 2:23), it is also a matter of record that Abraham "offered Isaac his son upon the altar. Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" (James 2:21-22)

The situation in which action by faith occurs is set up in the providence of God. The action which the believer takes is part of the situation; but the dynamic of that action is faith in the heart of man who sees how some promise of God could be fulfilled in this action. The situation is from God which makes the action meaningful. The promise which points to what could be done is from God: the faith that energizes the action is in man.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8).

Chapter 4

Following A Godly Example

As we read and study the Bible we learn a lot about the significance of the conduct and personal behavior of human beings. Apparently there are some persons who seek the help of God to live well. On the other hand there are many who depend on themselves or on others to get along, or to get by, or to get the most they can by their own efforts.

In the book of Genesis, the record presents several outstanding men who have become known as the Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The personal careers of Abraham and of Jacob are especially significant. Abraham is called the father of all who believe. And perhaps in the whole world no other man is so widely esteemed. The three religions among men on the face of the earth who put their faith in one God all count Abraham as their father. The Jewish, the Christian, and the Mohammedan religions all honor Abraham as their pioneer believer. Jacob is the man whose name was changed to Israel; and of course the Jews of today still think of themselves as the children of Israel.

The personal record of Abraham and of Jacob each respectively shows the greatness of that man. The record of Isaac coming between these two may seem to show that the life of Isaac was nothing remarkable; but this actually only seems that way. Whereas Abraham and Jacob loom in history as great mountain peaks on the horizon to be appreciated, Isaac has all the appearance of a lowland, a vast plain lying between the two mountain peaks. But study will show that Isaac was not so much a lowland, as he was a plateau. There seems no doubt that he was lesser in height than his father Abraham or his son Jacob. But Isaac was a plateau among men. There is much that we can learn from him.

As we look at the historical situation we will see that Isaac faced the problem of following a great, good man. This is not an easy thing to do well. It is natural for any young man coming into a place of privilege and opportunity, which has been previously occupied by a successful person, to feel a personal challenge. He will be challenged to show himself even more effective than his predecessor. This was the unhappy case of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, about whom we read in I Kings, chapter 12, verses 6 to 14. Rehoboam's ambition led him into foolish disregard of the wisdom of his older counselors. Rehoboam wanted to show that he was even greater than Solomon and in this he made a big mistake.

The major testimony of Isaac is indicated in the simple record of his wisdom in adopting the techniques and procedures of that able successful man who had preceded him: Abraham. We read in Genesis:

And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them (Genesis 26:18).

That is all that is said. And yet that is very, very important. Remember Isaac was a young man, when he was in charge of his inheritance. The issue in the case of Isaac was very clear. He was living in an arid country. Water was very scarce, but was very essential. Water was very precious. Abraham had lived in this land with his flocks and herds, and Abraham had been successful in locating water on these plains. A good water supply undoubtedly contributed to Abraham's wealth in his flocks and herds. And now Isaac had the responsibility of leadership. All was in his hands. Fortune and welfare depended on his good judgment. An Isaac becomes a great example for others to follow.

Isaac was wise enough to walk where the wise man who preceded him walked. Does that seem too

simple for you? Do you think that would be taken for granted? Stop and look around, or even think back in your own life. How normal it is, how natural it is for the incoming person to think that he must do better than the outgoing person did. Someone will say that is what makes him prosperous. You will find out that is not true. You will find out that is not true that the new generation will do better because they do it differently.

This whole problem becomes very clear as one studies it. Water was needed. Some water was available. Where the water could be located was dubious. Not everybody would know that. Isaac in himself may not have known where water would be found. But Abraham had lived there, and he had located some spots where water could be found. In the course of time, the Philistines had filled in his wells because they did not appreciate the Hebrews coming in and dwelling in this part of the country. So the Philistines handicapped the Hebrews by filling in those wells. When Isaac came to the place of responsible leadership, he showed his wisdom in that he led his people to the very places that Abraham had discovered. Isaac had his servants dig out the debris, and so water was available for his needs.

It really sounds so simple doesn't it? Abraham had found water. Isaac knew that, and he was smart enough to dig where Abraham dug. Because he dug where Abraham had found water, Isaac found water for his people and for their flocks and herds. His work was not as original as Abraham's had been, but his work was effectual. He became a worthy example for anyone to follow, who is given a task that has been well done by some former leader. It is the better part of wisdom to follow the course of others who have been successful. I think to myself I have to say that over and over and over again. It is the part of wisdom to follow in the steps of those who have been successful. That takes a certain amount of self-discipline. That takes a certain amount of humility. That takes actually an appreciation of the fact that the new man may not know any better and may not know even as much. The former person who had been successful had discovered the truth.

In the churches of today the same spiritual needs exist as they did in the days of our forefathers. Our forefathers found that the Scriptures were effectual in showing the Gospel. They came to know that in the Bible they could know the Word of God. Our forefathers spoke of sin, of repentance, of faith, of being born again, of avoiding the carnal, of choosing the spiritual, of receiving the Holy Spirit, of having joy and peace, and on and on in this way. We would show that we have the wisdom of Isaac if we would study these very ideas, and call them by the same names. This is very important. I think that one can hardly overstate its significance. It would be hard to over emphasize the importance when children are learning things, to have the oncoming generation realize that the former generation found out what the truth is, and that truth can be told in the very same words they used in time past.

When I began my own experience of trying to communicate the Gospel, i.e., when I began to preach, I found a strange situation. I found myself in a church that believed the Bible was the Word of God, the only infallible guide and rule in matters of faith and practice, and would you believe it, I was in a situation where the word "saved" was seldom used. You know to me, as a person who had once been an unbeliever and of an agnostic frame of mind, this was almost incredible. Nobody can read the New Testament, especially the epistles, without coming across the word "saved." Our Lord Jesus Christ is the "Savior." That is what He came to do, viz., "to save." I found myself in a fellowship of believing people, who were accustomed to going to church Sunday after Sunday, and who seldom heard from the pulpit the word "saved." I could almost shout about it right now. It was most astonishing to me that the word "repentance," and the fact of being born again and being regenerated, and of recognizing the difference between carnal living and spiritual living, and of admitting the truth of the Holy Spirit and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit: these things were all beside the point in the very fellowship into

which I came. I am so thankful that I did not depend upon them for my own heart and mind. I had the Bible in my hand. I had the responsibility to preach the Scriptures. I think for a long time in my early ministry I was somewhat notorious because I would stand up in an up-to-date, contemporary, respectable pulpit and talk to people about being saved. I stuck by that word. Isaac called those wells by the name that Abraham his father had called them. The born again soul is regenerated and will be saved by the grace of God. The power of God is available and God hears and answers prayer.

"The joy of the Lord will be your strength."

I would commend to everyone of you that when you read the Bible, or you read anything about the Bible, that you find out what the language is in the Scriptures, and stay as close to it as you can. There is power in those words of the Bible.

Chapter 5

Vision, Vow, Victory

In the life of Jacob we can see what happens in the birth of a soul. We will be thinking just now about beginning the spiritual life, beginning to live godly. Abraham had received from God the promise of the land of Canaan. That promise had been renewed with Isaac. Esau and Jacob were twins, with Esau being the firstborn. Esau had sold his birthright to Jacob, and Jacob with his mother Rebekah had connived to get Isaac's blessing. When Esau realized this, he vowed he would kill Jacob. Rebekah then urged Jacob to flee by going to live with Laban her brother.

As Jacob went on his journey, he personally came face to face with the reality of God and His promise to Abraham. The story of this classic encounter is in Genesis, chapter 28, verses 10-22. It is worth reading again. It reveals the truth about what happens when a person begins to live with God. Let me read a sentence to you:

And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it (Genesis 28:12).

The Hebrew word translated "ladder" actually means "ascending steps." The word "stairway" would give the idea very well. This brings "heaven" and "earth" in the one situation into one picture, as it were, as equally real. This insight into the reality of the two worlds and their relationship to each other is the primary element in a believer's mind. Heaven is just as real as this world is real: both are equally true. But that is not all.

The "angels of God ascending and descending" upon this stairway indicates there is communication, which is a way of saying what happens on earth matters in heaven; what happens in heaven matters on earth. Remember we are thinking about spiritual living. We are thinking about godly living. We are just taking into account now that if a person expects to have the experience of living in the Spirit, of living as it were with God, the first important thing is that he be aware, be conscious, of this.

Jacob also heard a message from God. He not only saw the stairway and saw the angels of God ascending and descending, but he heard something. He heard the Word of God promising personal blessing to him. God would give this very land in which he was living at that very moment to Jacob and to his seed after him. God would watch over Jacob wherever he went, keeping him and bringing him safely to this land. This reveals a dynamic aspect in the vision. It shows that God is not only alive: God not only exists; but God is active. God is a living Being. God has something in mind that involves the believer, that involves you and involves me.

This vision that Jacob had not only revealed things as they are, i.e., that heaven and earth are equally real; but also that God was interested in Jacob. This is significant for us because it reveals that God is interested in us. God is interested in each individual person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. This vision involved the living God in personal relationship with Jacob, and so this assures me that God has personal relationships with me. This Scripture reveals that the believer not only may be aware of the reality of heaven, and of the actual relationship between heaven and earth, but he may also be aware of the living God and of His revealed intention to bless the believer forever. Such conviction prompts the heart to be willing to obey Him and to seek His favor. This is how it worked in Jacob's heart.

The first response in Jacob was one of awe and reverence. "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew

it not . . . this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Genesis 28:16, 17). I wish I had more time for us to wait there, to pause there. If you are reading these words, have this in mind. If you or I, if anybody, is going to have any personal relationship with God, it is basically important that I realize that the ground I am standing on is holy ground. It would be a marvelous thing if I could just bring myself to the idea that what I ought to do is take off my shoes because I am standing in the very presence of God.

Jacob then set up an altar. He called the name of that place Bethel. This is what I need to do. I need to set up an altar in my heart and call the name of that place Bethel. No matter how I say it, I will never say it well enough to bring to my mind and to yours the fact that the very essence, the very beginning of my spiritual experience with God, is to be aware that Almighty God wants to have personal relationships with me. There is something about the believer's relationship with God that does not include anybody else. When I have said "God," I included the idea of God the Father, Christ Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit, these three of the Triune God. This is the One who wants to have personal fellowship with me. The problem is with myself. I am the problem. Will I be aware of this?

In this account of Jacob's vision it seems clear that reference to God and the adoration of God are not so much a matter of the human will. It is not so much that I am going to make up my mind that I am going to reverence God, that I am going to make up my mind to adore God, or that I am going to make up my mind to obey God. God is doing something about this. The individual believer experiences the presence of God. The believer's life is a response to the revelation of God and to His will.

And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me. . . . (Genesis 28:20)

This word "*if*" does not imply a question; it states a condition. The meaning can be more obvious in our translation if we put in the word "since," or the word "inasmuch as": "since God will be with me"; "inasmuch as God will be with me." Have you ever heard something like this? "If that is your car out there in front of the house (and you know right well it is), the lights are on." Or someone will say to a parent, "If that is your son out there on the street, he is in danger." When Jacob is reported to have said:

If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God (Genesis 28:20-21).

he is saying,

Inasmuch as God is going to be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, . . . then shall the Lord be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee (Genesis 28:20-22).

It can be noted that Jacob did not plan to serve God in order to earn blessing. Believers do not start out to serve God in order that they can earn something. But being blessed, they plan to serve Him in response to God's goodness and bounty. Paul wrote to the Romans "the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance" (Romans 2:4).

This principle is very basic in the believer's experience. Living in faith is never a matter of the natural man coming to God by way of service that he might be blessed as a reward: but it is God seeking the soul and blessing the man in God's grace, so that the service of the believer is in response to God in thankful praise. John states this principle very clearly:

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

and again,

We love him, because he first loved us (I John 4:19).

The tithe as here expressed by Jacob, was not a tactic designed to secure blessing: it does bring blessing and it is an important thing in a person's spiritual experience. But it was not done in a scheming way. It was a response that showed appreciation and gratitude for a blessing already received. This will be the characteristic of the believing soul. All service will be offered to God as praise for "His goodness which endureth forever." Jacob was moved to want to serve God. In doing this, Jacob planned to use a portion of what God had given him. Such activity as that of worshipping the presence of God at the altar, and of using a portion of the benefits one has received, to do that which would please God by way of service, will promote the love and the joy of the believer.

The life of Jacob from this time on in the record of Scripture shows much continued blessing. It was a life of victory. Not every detail was good. Jacob faced some real disappointments in his career. But God watched over him at all times. In the great crises which threatened his undoing, God heard his prayer and gave him the victory.

In line with our interest in these studies we may well take this pattern as classic for all spiritual experience. The first phase is that of vision: an insight into the reality of the spiritual world: the actual interaction of the spiritual and the natural, the gracious purpose of the living God to bless those who believe in Him. Jesus of Nazareth implied that He was the connection between the natural and the spiritual in the work of salvation as we read what He said to Nathaniel:

Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man (John 1:51).

Chapter 6

Perseverance In Prayer

We are studying the scriptures now to learn what principles are revealed as being involved in the promotion of godly living. If a person were a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and wanted to grow in grace and in knowledge, and wanted to become a stronger believer, what might he do? These are the things we are seeking now to find out in our study.

The living God is performing the work of salvation. We are thankful that some human beings are being saved by the power of God. We understand that salvation is achieved through Christ Jesus by the grace of God in all who accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Some believing persons are more blessed than others. The greater blessing comes to those who walk more closely and keep His commandments more diligently. There are some principles that we can recognize which will help the soul to greater blessing. For example Paul wrote:

I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting (I Timothy 2:8).

Praying seems to be to the soul what breathing is to the body. That is to say, praying is an essential exercise for the believer's own spiritual life. No doubt praying is the way to receive benefit. It has been well said: "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." But exercising oneself in prayer: committing oneself in this matter of approaching God for things, is actually good for the believer himself, as well as being the authorized procedure for getting things done by the power of God.

One of the aspects of praying that presents a problem is the fact that it can happen that what one prays for does not always happen at once. The question then arises: should one continue to pray? Does repeated praying for the same thing imply any lack of trust in God? Would a person show more faith if he asked once, and then not again? Fortunately, in this regard we have guidance from Scripture that points the believer clearly to the principle that he should exercise.

And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city: and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? (Luke 18:1-8)

This parable is so clearly an answer to the problem we have raised there can be no question as to the guidance from the Lord to the believer.

On another occasion Jesus of Nazareth taught that praying for help is in the will of God. It is true that God is good: He is gracious and faithful. He knows our needs before we even ask Him. But the commandment of the Lord is clear: "Pray."

And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my

children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened (Luke 11:5-10).

Many related blessings follow when one prays. Answers to prayer actually strengthen the believer's faith. Then, too, there is a closer fellowship with the Lord. The things of God and the things of heaven become more vivid and more promising when we pray. In this study, we are interested especially in all that will promote godly living. There can be no doubt that praying is a prime factor. If a believer is involved in business affairs when he has problems, he will pray to God about those problems. I am quite sure that so far as his business is concerned that benefits will follow. But I am also quite sure that praying will matter to the believer. The believer will be stronger in relationships with God because of this exercise in praying to God for practical needs.

The classic example of perseverance in praying occurred in the life of Jacob when he was on the way home after serving his uncle Laban for twenty years. The story is told in the book of Genesis, chapter 32.

Jacob's brother Esau had been profoundly alienated from Jacob, when Rebekah and Jacob arranged to deceive Isaac so that Jacob received the blessing which Isaac thought he was bestowing upon Esau. Esau had vowed that he would kill his brother Jacob. Helped again by his mother, Jacob fled to his uncle Laban for security. Now after 20 years Jacob is returning to his native land. When Esau heard that his brother Jacob was coming home, he went out to meet him with a band of soldiers. Jacob recognized this as a threat to his possessions and to his life.

After doing what he could to prepare a humble meeting with his brother, Jacob went to God in prayer to gain His help. Jacob was not inclined to take God's blessing for granted. How often, how easily, believers take for granted that God will bless. And I am sure God will do many, many things in blessing. No doubt He will do far more than the believer could ask or think, but the Word of God reveals that God wants the believer to talk to Him. God wants the believer to ask Him. Jacob was not inclined to take God's blessing for granted. He came before God to get the assurance that he would be protected in this encounter with Esau.

The praying of Jacob occurred in the form of wrestling with an angel in the form of a man "at the ford Jabbok." The wrestling continued all night long. Jacob could not prevail, but he would not quit. In the course of this contest, the angel touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh; "and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him." The account tells of a man in a wrestling match crippled but hanging on. Jacob held on. As the day began to dawn the angel asked Jacob to let him go. But Jacob answered, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Genesis 32:26). This has become the classic inspiration to unceasing prayer. In the course of what followed Jacob's name was changed to ". . . Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (Genesis 32:28).

When Jesus of Nazareth taught His disciples to pray, He told parables to make His meaning clear. He told the parable of the persistent widow who kept coming to the unjust judge, to teach the obvious lesson that believers should come again and again and again. This is the meaning of that Scripture "praying always." This does not mean only to pray in every situation; but in any and every case, praying until the answer comes.

Jesus of Nazareth also told the parable of the friend who came at midnight to get food for his unexpected visitor. In his need the friend comes at midnight to make his request; and will not take "No" for an answer! Jesus of Nazareth told that parable for us all. It seems almost like overemphasis the way

the Word of God presses upon us that we should come to God to ask again and again and again.
The wonderful truth about praying is that God wants us to pray.

I will therefore that men pray everywhere. . . . (I Timothy 2:8)

God wants us to continue in praying.

Men ought always to pray, and not to faint (Luke 18:1).

In any time of special need we should "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matthew 7:7). Believers should continue in praying, even as Jacob continued to pray until the answer came.

When we consider this we humbly look up to God; and then we say to each other, "Brethren, let us pray."

Chapter 7

Faithful

One characteristic that is common to all godly persons is personal integrity. Not only will such a person be carefully honest in all statements or reports: but anyone who is living godly will remain constant in any commitment made about anything. The godly person will be faithful in any situation. To be found faithful to any and to every trust is a definite trait found in believers in Christ Jesus, who was faithful to His Father in all that He faced while He was here on earth.

This characteristic will be manifested in many varied, specific situations, but it is general in nature. When you find a person faithful here and faithful there, the reason that he is faithful in this and faithful in that and faithful in the other thing is because that person is faithful all the way through, not just once or twice but always. When a person is faithful in any one instance, it is not so much that in that instance he or she was found faithful, as it is that that person was faithful in himself or herself; and this trait simply happened to be seen in this specific situation, in this specific way. You may happen to notice that the man is faithful in his business. But the kind of man who is faithful in his business will be faithful in his home, in his community; he will be faithful anywhere that you find him.

To be faithful in any sense displays a certain continuance of personal attitudes. There must be a certain persistence of intention. If a person is going to be faithful, he needs to have himself set that way. It is more than making up his mind. It does not mean that somebody who could have been faithful or unfaithful just made up his mind to be faithful. No, there is more to it than that. There needs to be something so basic, so inward, so essential, inside the person himself that the faithfulness is a natural outflow. There must be a certain persistence of intention on his part in his mind. He must expect to continue together with a certain permanence in any action taken. Anything like caprice or vacillation (now I do, now I don't) is not present in faithfulness. There is nothing tentative, temporary or experimental in any decision reached. There is something as if it were age old, a finality that is implied when a decision is reached by a faithful man. When he forms a judgment or takes a stand his action is there permanently. There is something unchangeable in a godly person.

Joseph, the son of Jacob and Rachel, is a classic example of one who is faithful. Some details about Joseph as a child are recorded. I am going to mention some of these having in mind that we are not given any intimation in Scripture as to the bearing that these conditions had, if they had any, on the personality of Joseph. But the record is there. Jacob's love for Rachel is well known; and the child born to them would be a child born of loving parents. Joseph was Rachel's firstborn son. He was not born until late in the life of either the father and the mother. We can almost understand when we read:

Now Israel (Jacob) loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colors (Genesis 37:3).

Joseph encountered the jealousy of his brothers because of his father's favor. Joseph also dreamed dreams in which he saw himself as becoming the most important person in the family. When he told these dreams, his brethren hated him even more. The Scriptures give no hint how these conditions contributed to the development of Joseph, if in fact they did; but the Scriptures record these circumstances, and I wanted to share them with you. I am rather inclined to think that such conditions matter. I am somewhat inclined to think that a faithful father and a faithful mother, or should I say a

loving father and a loving mother, parents that are genuinely committed to each other, are likely to beget a child that is steadfast in disposition. I think it is possible that kindly treatment, loving treatment, by parents to a child may have much to do with developing a strong personality in that child. I am inclined to think that is true; and I understand that all modern observation in child psychology confirms that idea; but again I would not want to insist on its being absolutely true. It is interesting to notice that these conditions surrounded Joseph.

In any case Joseph was entrusted by his father when Joseph was still just a young lad. He was so young that he was not out in the field working with his brothers, but his father sent him to check up on his brothers, because he would bring an honest report to Jacob of the work that his brothers were doing. Apparently, Jacob trusted Joseph to tell the truth.

When Joseph came to his brothers, they sold him to a band of Ishmaelites to be taken to Egypt as a slave. There his competence and his integrity were recognized by his master, Potiphar, who put him in charge of all his affairs. Joseph proved to be faithful there. Even though he had been sold as a slave, even though he had been rejected by his brethren and now was in a situation wherein he was distinctly at a disadvantage, yet when he began to act he acted faithfully.

When Potiphar's wife failed to seduce Joseph, she slandered him with false accusations, so that he was cast into prison as a malefactor. Thus he was unjustly put into prison. In prison, he conducted himself in such a way that he was put in charge of all the prison. Despite the fact that he had been sold by his brethren, and slandered by Potiphar's wife, he showed himself faithful even as a prisoner.

While in prison Joseph had the opportunity to show his wisdom in interpreting dreams for two of Pharaoh's officers, the chief butler and the chief baker. The dream of the butler predicted good fortune for him. Joseph requested that when the butler had been released from prison and restored to his position, that he would speak to Pharaoh about Joseph who had been unjustly put in prison, that he, too, might be released. When it happened as Joseph had predicted, and the butler was released from prison and restored to his place, he forgot about Joseph. So Joseph remained in prison. I oftentimes think that would be something hard to bear, to think that in spite of everything that had happened to him and along with all that was going on now, he is forgotten. The man who could have helped him, forgot. But Joseph continued to be faithful, winning the total confidence of the jailer.

In time Pharaoh was bothered by a dream, and the butler remembered Joseph in prison. He told Pharaoh about Joseph. Pharaoh had forgotten the dream, but Joseph told him that he would find out what the dream was. In due time he came and told Pharaoh what the dream had been, and what its message was. Pharaoh was so impressed that he took Joseph out of prison, and made him the chief ruler of the empire next to Pharaoh himself. In this responsibility Joseph showed wisdom and skill in being altogether faithful to his assignment.

Later his brothers came to Egypt to buy corn. Joseph maneuvered to bring all his brethren and his father Jacob to Egypt where they were favorably received because of Joseph.

In reviewing the career of Joseph, it is noteworthy that despite the succession of injustices and mistreatments, Joseph continued to be faithful in whatever circumstances he endured. This was remarkable, and raises the question as to how this could be. It would seem that prolonged and repeated abuse would in time have generated resentment and provoked some sort of reaction in retaliation. But Joseph would never have been entrusted with places of responsibility, if he had been sulky or if he had been pouting about his treatment.

A clue to Joseph's freedom from inclination to retaliate or at least to rebel against such unfair treatment is found in his answer to his brethren:

But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them (Genesis 50:20-21).

This was a remarkable exhibition of quiet faithfulness in his situation. Joseph had an almost superhuman freedom from resentment and any temptation to retaliation. Such an attitude belongs to a man who is faithful where he is put. It is not that faithfulness begets this attitude, but this attitude begets faithfulness. The source of faithfulness is lodged in the continuing confidence in the presence and the grace of Almighty God. Joseph could be faithful wherever he was put, because Joseph was able to understand and to believe that what happened to him happened to him in the providence and the will of God. God was to be trusted. Such assurance belongs to a person who is trustworthy.

Chapter 8

Choosing Christ

In studying all that is involved in promoting godly living it is most important to realize that this is not some superior level of human endeavor which any man could achieve by dint of personal high resolve and determined self discipline. In other words, godly living is not something a person does in his own strength because he wants to do it. There is always a history involved which led that person to make a choice in which he committed himself to obey the will of God at all times at any cost to himself.

We are interested just now in learning what the Bible teaches about living in the will of God. This is what the public understands as godly living, or as we understand it, spiritual living. There seems to be no question but that godly living was perfectly manifested in Jesus of Nazareth. In His case there was no issue in which any choice was involved. He did not need to change. There was no reason why He should make any choice. He was God, incarnate in human form, but always God. The whole stance for His life can be felt in this Scripture:

A body hast thou prepared for me: . . . Lo, I come to do thy will, O God (Hebrews 19:5, 7).

As he lived Jesus of Nazareth said about Himself, "The Son can do nothing of Himself. " Again He said, "I do all things to please my Father." The climax in the life of Christ as Jesus of Nazareth can be seen in Gethsemane when He cried out, "Not my will, but thine be done." This seems to be the crucial issue in godly living: this is what it is all about. To be able to say "Not my will, but thine be done." In any given situation the godly person looks up to ask, "What wilt Thou have me to do?" What I have just been saying to you is that anytime, anywhere, the godly person is involved in any situation that requires some choice to be made or some action to be taken, the godly person lifts up the heart and mind to the presence of God, and asks "What wilt Thou have me to do?" This response is ready in the soul of the godly man. It is not a matter of the godly man surveying the issue before him and making a judgment that it would be better now to do the will of God and so to ask God for guidance. All such thinking is bypassed by a foregone conclusion:

"I am Thine, O Lord, I have heard Thy voice. . . ."

This is what marks the person who lives in the will of God. He has a recommitment at anytime, anywhere, always settled for all time: "I have come to do what God wants me to do. What wilt Thou have me to do?"

The classic parable that shows this truth is the well known parable of the rich young ruler. He came to Jesus of Nazareth to seek guidance that he might achieve "eternal life." He was following a very natural line of thought. He had evidently seen the manner of living that Jesus of Nazareth was demonstrating, manifesting; and as he had seen this, he felt in his heart he wanted to be that way. So he came to ask Jesus of Nazareth what he should do. As Jesus of Nazareth talked to him, He tested him, you might say, by saying, "Do the right thing. Keep the commandments." The young man, you will remember, said, "I have done that. I have done that ever since I was a child. What lack I yet?" He knew he did not have what Jesus of Nazareth had. So this was the cry of his earnest heart: "What lack I yet?"

Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me (Matthew 19:21).

The serious nature of this charge to the young man can be felt, when we read that the young man went away sorrowful for he had great possessions.

An aspect of this whole problem can be felt in the record of Nicodemus who came to find out about the Gospel. He came to Jesus of Nazareth at night to talk with Him. He was clearly told, "You must be born again." Nicodemus wanted to find out from Jesus of Nazareth: "How can it be done? How can anybody live the way you are teaching, the way you are showing?" He was given the answer: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (John 3:6-7).

Paul discusses what is involved here in his epistle to the Romans, chapter 8:5-14. We read:

For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace (Romans 8:6).

To be "spiritually minded" is to be involved in spiritual living, and that will bring life and peace. Apparently such "living" is possible, but it is not natural. I could never do it by myself. Being born again, indwelt by the Holy Spirit and having "Christ in you, the hope of glory," is the way it is done.

This whole truth is so clearly revealed in the record of Moses when you look at the report about him in the book of Hebrews.

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season (Hebrews 11:24-25).

This is a significant record: "Choosing rather to suffer affliction." It was not going to be easy. Walking this way would mean he would be hurt. It was this kind of choice that led Jesus Christ to Gethsemane. He was in the will of His Father. Sometimes people wonder whether or not, if a person were doing absolutely the right thing would he ever be hurt. Oh, yes! He would start hurting at the outset and he would hurt all the way through. There is no human being living that will find that walking in the ways of the Lord is going to be any satisfaction to his flesh. It is true, a person can get to the place where he is so committed to the Lord, that he does it every day and can have joy in doing it. But of this man Moses it is said of him, "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." There are pleasures of sin, and they are real; and they can be very, very enticing. There is one thing true about them, however, they are only temporary. A person can have them now. But no one can have them forever. A person cannot take them with him. How was Moses able to make this choice?

... esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt. ... (Hebrews 11:26)

In his consciousness Moses was exercising a certain appraisal, a certain evaluation. Moses had made in his life one great important decision, and at that time all his understanding was brought to focus. At one time he considered the whole thing. He knew perfectly well that if he were going to walk in the ways of God it would mean trouble. Certainly. It would mean he would be hurt. Yes. It would mean danger. Yes. This is "the reproach of Christ." The world is not for the believer. "Whatsoever is pleasing in the sight of men is an abomination in the sight of God." If a person will walk in the ways of God, he can depend

upon it right now that so far as he personally is concerned, he will not be able to do as he pleases. He will have to do some things he will not like; but Moses "esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." Moses was looking forward and there was something ahead that made it worthwhile. This will help us to remember what is written about Jesus of Nazareth:

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).

We recognize that there is far more here than we have time to set forth but it does have these aspects about it.

It is simply a matter of making a choice to walk in the ways of God, even though that means (and it does mean) that one cannot do as one pleases. The obedient believer will not be getting the things that he would like personally, but he will be getting those things that God will give him which are far more important.

Chapter 9

Delivered

One of the great tragedies of human experience is that a person may become so ensnared in the course of living that there may be no freedom or liberty to act in ways that promise to lead to blessedness. A young person may get married while in high school, and be quite unable to share in advantages which may be offered in the educational opportunity open only to unmarried students. A person may squander money, secured perhaps by mortgaging his possessions, and then find himself unable to finance an opportunity in business that would have been to his great financial benefit. A student may spend hours watching TV and then come to the deadline for the term paper without the work being done. The dangers for the soul of being ensnared by previous action are even more profound.

In doing things that please the flesh a person can become conditioned to certain action patterns which we call habits. It can become habitual to do things in a certain way, even if that way is not good. Such habits can be so deeply ingrained in the personality pattern that their existence may actually escape notice. That is one of the unhappy things about living. A person can get so used to being as he is that he thinks that is the only way to be, when actually the way he is may be in bondage. Such habits will definitely hamper and hinder godly living. Since the very essence of godliness is self denial, habits of self indulgence are a definite hindrance to godly living. This is what Peter had in mind:

. . . abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul (I Peter 2:11).

I do not feel that I have yet understood what is actually involved in the relationship which can exist between demons or evil spirits and human beings, or between Satan and the human soul. I am inclined to think that there are evil spirits, demons, beings, in the invisible spiritual world that seek to gain some foothold in the consciousness or the mind of man: especially in the case of a believer. Satan apparently is allowed to approach a person with suggestions and considerations which tempt that person to act on his own without seeking the help or the mind of God. This will surely lead into trouble.

We hasten to remind ourselves that Christ Jesus has won the victory over Satan and his host; and that His name, the name of Jesus Christ, is respected and feared by the evil spirits far beyond any other factor in the whole of creation. It is possible for the intelligent believer who has his confidence in Jesus Christ to invoke the power of the Lord to attain complete deliverance.

The truth of deliverance is revealed in the history of Israel at the time of the Exodus from Egypt. There are two aspects illustrated in the affairs of the Hebrews that have become widely known. The Passover demonstrates the aspect of the soul's spiritual relationships in which anyone can be delivered from bondage to ungodly powers. The crossing of the Red Sea demonstrates how any person can be delivered from weakness and from habits of indulgence. In each case the incident is to be seen as a parable that reveals the truth.

The Hebrews had lived more than 400 years in Egypt. In this time the Egyptian government had established control over them. In order to take action in any direction, the Hebrews needed to have the consent of Pharaoh. This would be in a sense because they had already given their allegiance. There was a sense in which on their part they had yielded to him somehow so that he had control, and now in order for them to take action in any direction, they needed to have his consent. Such servitude to ungodly powers prevents personal obedience to the will of the living God. Jesus of Nazareth taught:

Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin (John 8:34).

Since "there is no man that sinneth not" it follows that all men are born in bondage, because "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). In a very real sense the bondage of the Hebrews in slavery under Pharaoh is a clear figure of the bondage of the natural man in his sin.

In fulfilling His covenant with Abraham, God planned to bless the Hebrews with His presence and in His guidance. As long as they were under the control of Pharaoh they could not obey God. "No man can serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24). But the Hebrews themselves were not able to throw off their bondage to Pharaoh. They were helpless in their slavery. It would be necessary that Pharaoh himself give them relief and this was done because of the Passover.

The incident in the history of the Hebrews which we call the Passover is clearly outlined. Let me summarize the aspects of it for our attention.

A judgment went out upon the whole land: the firstborn would die. This was all the way across the board: even the firstborn of the animals would die. This doom threatened all. Everybody was under threat. The Hebrews, the Egyptians, every living creature, was under this plague of death.

The second point for us to notice is that instruction from God through Moses to the Hebrews pointed the way to escape this doom. While it is commonly understood and easily realized that death is the lot of all men, and that it is appointed unto man once to die, it is the glory of the Gospel that God is able to deliver from death. That is the significance of the resurrection. It is the significance of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The one thing He came to do was to share eternal life which never dies. When the Hebrews were in Egypt, God through Moses instructed the Hebrews how they could escape this common judgment, this doom, that threatened the whole country.

The next point to notice in this account is that an innocent substitute was to die, a lamb. I suppose of all creatures that is one of the most innocent creatures. A lamb was to die, in order that this deliverance might take place.

The next point follows immediately. The believing person, any Hebrew that would believe, anybody that would believe, must accept the substitution. He would do this by putting the blood of this slain lamb on the doorpost. That is what we talk about when we say "being under the blood."

The fifth point is that the believing person must obey instruction by trusting in the promises. The Hebrews were to go into their houses and stay there until the whole event was over. This is similar to the time when Noah was taken into the ark. Then God shut the door. Noah was to stay there, until the whole flood was past. The believing person enters into Christ and stays in Him.

The sixth point in this outline about the Passover is a glorious one. The believing person (the Hebrew) would be spared. That is why it is called the Passover. The word is "When I see the blood, I will pass over you."

Then the final stage, the seventh in the series, the believing person will now be free to begin obeying God. Moses had them all dressed and packed, ready to go as soon as Pharaoh would give the release.

The next event we think of in this connection is the crossing of the Red Sea. The crossing of the Red Sea verified in actual fact what the Passover promised in a figure. In this whole incident attention is directed to the might of Pharaoh, Pharaoh's power. The might of Pharaoh was invincible. The Hebrews could not defeat him. It was also true that the mind of Pharaoh was implacable. He was not willing that the Hebrews should go free. God in His personal guidance led the Hebrews to cross the waters of the Red Sea. This was made possible because. God in His sovereign control opened the waters of the sea, so that the Hebrews could cross on dry land.

Pharaoh's arrogant confidence and blind persistence in his pursuit of the Hebrews led him to attempt to do the same thing. God in His sovereign control let the waters return and destroy Pharaoh and his host. In this simple yet profound event the Hebrews now were really free. The spiritual truth being demonstrated is indicated by Paul when he writes to say "that being dead wherein we here held" (Romans 7:6). The Scriptures do not spell out just how believers are delivered from the bondage of evil spirits, but we can be sure that it is all implied in these events we have been studying.

For he that is dead is freed from sin (Romans 6:7).

Chapter 10

Guidance

We are continuing our study of the principles for holy living which are set forth in the Bible. I have undertaken to pick out a number of these as we look through the revelation of God in His Word.

The course of living is very similar to a moving stream that is moving forward through ever changing circumstances. It is like a stream flowing through a landscape that has varying conditions in the environment. There can be a stretch of smooth, plain, level land such as in a meadow, and then again there can be a stretch of dashing down the hillside over rocks as in the mountains. The course of living itself is very similar to this. Much of what occurs depends on the direction of the flow. Man is often aware of various alternatives which present options for him, challenging his choices. The world is so constituted that the course of events is not fixed in any predetermined fashion. While God is sovereign in what He will allow, man is free to choose whatever alternative he wishes at any point. The choice the man makes will have a direct bearing upon what happens to him.

The problem of choice is very important in the life of a believer. The natural man will be aware of natural aspects and factors, and will need to make his choice in the light of things as he sees them naturally; but the spiritual man is aware of two worlds, so that his choice, while it is exercised in this world, is also related not only to this world but also the world of spiritual reality. Perhaps the most significant aspect of choosing what a person will do is that it is all unknown to him. He has not been over this road before. There is a real sense in which every believer is walking in the steps of Abraham who "went out not knowing whither he went."

But the believer is in a very fortunate position. His trust is in God, and God does know the route. "He knoweth the way I take." This was demonstrated in the history of Israel in the Exodus from Egypt. The Hebrews were to journey from Egypt to Canaan through an uncharted wilderness. God had sent Moses to be their leader, but God also provided direct guidance from Himself.

A cloud was to guide them by day and a pillar of fire by night. Speculation has never been able to offer any satisfactory explanation of these phenomena. It is a wise procedure to read the record as it is, and to marvel at it, without seeking any natural, rational explanation. Suffice it to say that the cloud and the pillar of fire functioned adequately. The Hebrews were led along a course that was probably far more practical and useful than they could ever have known in their own wisdom.

It might be helpful to recognize that it is quite likely that the guidance by the cloud would be effected not by the Hebrews looking up into the sky to note the direction the cloud was taking, but by noting the shadow on the ground, and then walking in that shadow. Even so the guidance by the pillar of fire would not be so much by the Hebrews looking up at the fire, as it would be by their walking in the light as the fire cast the light upon the ground so that their pathway was illuminated.

Even so with the believer who today will seek guidance from God as he lives along from day to day. All the circumstances a believer may encounter are under the sovereign providence of God, that is true, but there are still many options from which he must choose. At any one point, he could go in several different directions.

The believer has the advantage of the Scriptures which reveal the ways of God in dealing with men. The more the believer knows the Bible, the clearer guidance will be in his heart as he looks ahead in living. This is the great benefit to be derived from Bible study. Paul reminded the Corinthian believers:

Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come (I Corinthians 10:11).

Also when you read in the book of Romans you will find:

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope (Romans 15:4).

In addition to having the Scriptures in his hand, the believer has the Holy Spirit in his heart. As he moves ahead, and sees the various options before him, he can expect to be guided by an inner message which will come as a definite directive "This is the way, walk ye in it."

If the option before him is a matter of serious consequences about which he can have time to pray, it is possible that continuing in prayer may be necessary for some time before the answer comes plainly, but the promise is definite. "Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

The believer must always guard against false suggestions coming into his mind. The flesh will have strong desires, or the person himself may have selfish motives and selfish ambitions. There may be other spiritual weaknesses in the believer that will require the believer to humble himself and to yield himself afresh to Christ. But the promise is still true: "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, I will do."

And so we cannot help but feel that so far as the believer is concerned in seeking the guidance of God, he will, of course, check his environment, his circumstances. He will take note of the way in which he has come. He will keep in mind the end toward which he wants to go, and he will look around him and recognize as nearly as possible the significance of the situation that he is in. All these things belong to the whole story. But that is not all. After he has thoroughly reviewed, analyzed, checked, and can say that he knows the situation that he is in, he will have discovered that there are several alternatives, several different ways in which he could go. He can then turn to the Scriptures to see if there is any guidance for him. But above all and in it all, and from beginning to end, he will maintain a relationship with God in prayer, waiting on the Lord to guide him.

Supporting considerations, such as getting to know the circumstances he is under, can assure the believer of his guidance. If circumstances seem to lead in a certain direction, if providence seems to have led this way in the past, if the heart is humble and the spirit is committed to the Lord, the guidance that he receives can be accepted with confidence. There seems to be no reason why the believer should not ask for confirmation of his understanding if he feels any doubt. Let us suppose that a person faces a problem, and in studying the problem he can see several different possible alternatives: he could do like this; he could do like that; or he could do like that. He sees these possibilities, and then prays, yielding himself to God until he finally feels this is the way he should go. But he may not be as sure as he would like to be, and may seek to feel absolutely sure, having his assurance "doubly sure," as it were, he could search the Scriptures to see where something like this has been done. In doing so a person could be asking the Lord to give him some corroborating evidence.

I think a classic example of this sort of problem would be the incident of Gideon's fleece. Gideon was considering a certain military maneuver, which was daring, and which would depend upon God for success. Gideon felt that he needed to have more assurance, double assurance, that this was God's will for him. He put out a fleece and asked the Lord that He should let the fleece be dry and all the ground around it be wet during the night. When this happened Gideon very humbly asked the Lord not to hold it against him, but to give him another proof. The next night Gideon asked that the fleece be wet, and the ground around it be dry. It was so wet that he could wring the water out of the fleece. In that way,

Gideon's assurance of direction was confirmed. In the event that any believer may possibly want to have additional confirmation for his guidance, this incident of Gideon's fleece can assure such a person that asking for reassuring confirmation will not be specially displeasing to God. It could be that there is something further to learn. Maybe in all that experience the believer will come through to where when he can see what the Scripture says and how the Spirit leads him. We can be sure that if we should ask the Lord for confirmation of His guidance, there is nothing in Scripture to say that we are doing anything wrong.

God only knows the way ahead, and He alone knows what tomorrow will bring. The believer should seek His will and be ready to do it and then put his trust in the Lord.

May the Lord guide every one of you who reads these words and bless you and lead you day by day. God is merciful and gracious and he can be trusted.

Chapter 11

Provision

The living organism needs food that life may continue. In the case of the physical being, the food is physical and is found in the physical environment. We never think anything of it. We just think that everything that is alive is going to eat. Food is necessary for vitality and strength. As with a wood fire, fuel must be continually added. So the human being is dependent upon his environment. His physical body needs physical food. But "man shall not live by bread alone."

Man is more than his body. He has a spirit in him that needs the Word of God as food for his vitality and strength. It is important just to remember that the spirit that we have within us is not at one time permanently, forever, as it is; that it doesn't need a thing, that it is always there. No, the truth is that the spirit of man needs food to be alive and strong. Just as his body needs to eat again and again, so his spirit needs to hear the Word of God again and again. Since the Word of God is written in the Scriptures which comprise our Bible, the believer needs to read the Bible, to study the Bible, to remember the Bible again and again, to be healthy and strong.

I am sure some people will wonder about those people in the world who have a spirit in them and do not have the Bible.

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard (Psalm 19:1-3).

All people need to look at, listen to, be aware of, the evidence of the reality of God that the truth of God might be in the hearts and minds. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Another thing we need to keep in mind so far as a person's faith is concerned, is that if on a given day I find that I have faith in God, I should thank the Lord. That is a gift from God. But I should keep in mind that does not mean that faith is going to be there as it is, all the time without any attention. Faith needs to be fed. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

We can learn much about this whole truth by noting how God provided the Hebrews with the food they needed in the desert during the exodus. Each morning the ground was covered with "manna," which the Hebrews were to gather "before the sun was up," and to use as food. They were to gather each morning enough for that day, for five days in the week. On the sixth day, each was to gather a double portion to support him with food over the Sabbath Day. On the seventh day, which was the Sabbath, they were not to gather any; that was the day of rest.

In the event that anyone would gather more than the day's supply, the extra manna would spoil, and be infested with maggots. This meant that it was important that each family should collect food for each day, trusting God to supply more manna on the next day as needed. I cannot help but think this makes a very significant suggestion about Bible study, about Bible reading. I am inclined to think that if I depend upon my memory of what I have read, I should beware lest it spoil. How would it spoil. I will get my own ideas in there. If I just read the Bible and think about it, and am blessed by it and have that in mind; then let the days go by and the days go by and the days go by and I say, "Well, I read it. I know about it." What I do not realize is my memory is shifting and changing and my own ideas are coming in there. Let us remember so far as manna was concerned, the manna they did not use on the particular day

spoiled.

In these detailed regulations there is much to learn. Taking the Scriptures as the "manna" from heaven to feed the soul, it can be seen that the soul should feed on the Scriptures daily. There should be a fresh, new reading or hearing of the Scriptures every day. The tendency to attend revival services and then later to go for a long time without attending any preaching or worship services at all is not healthy procedure; it is not wholesome.

The fact that the manna would melt away when the sun rose indicates that to put off reading the Bible may well be harmful, because the pressure and the distress of the daily problems can so affect the person that he cannot get a true grasp of the Word of God.

We are studying factors that will promote godly living. This is not so much dependent upon purpose and intention as it is upon conviction. Godly living is promoted not so much by what I purpose to do, and by what I intend to do, as it is upon what I believe is true. Conviction about the truth is more important for godly living, than what I intend to do about it. Of course that is because it is primary in the way I believe. The way I think, the way I am convinced, that is the way I intend. Purpose and intention plan to make use of personal will power and personal strength; but conviction leads the soul to depend upon God. As long as my future conduct depends upon me there is always the unhappy prospect that I will get tired of trying to do God's will; but when my future conduct depends upon God working in me to will and to do of His good pleasure, I can have the assurance that it will come to pass. So the very essence of godly living is to have strong personal conviction about Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

The truth about God is beyond the reach of man's mind. God is in heaven, and is invisible to human eyes. No man by searching can find out God, but God is almighty and wise. God can reveal Himself to man and this He has done in His Word. The Son of God became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth so that men could see Him. He could say, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). The Word of God written is the Scripture.

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).

Paul reminded Timothy "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" (II Timothy 3:15). This tells us that the soul can come to faith by knowing the Scripture. That is the way Timothy came to faith. Thus it would appear that a person can become a believer by knowing the Scriptures because that is the way it worked with Timothy. Also we can remember that Peter urged his readers "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (I Peter 2:2). As a matter of fact, the believer can grow into maturity by feeding on the Scriptures as a baby feeds on milk.

A man cannot create or produce the food he needs by any effort or wisdom of his own, but he can find it in the environment and prepare it according to his taste so that he will eat it. This is the source of his vitality and his strength. Even so the spirit of man can never be fed with the products of man's own efforts. Paul said on Mars Hill that it was the will of God that man "should seek the Lord . . . though he be not far from every one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being. . . ." (Acts 17:27-28)

Just as God provided the manna for the Hebrews in the desert, so God provides His word for our spirits in and through the Scriptures. Godly living resulting from a strong faith in God is actually promoted and strengthened in anyone who will read, study, know and obey the Scripture, the Bible.

Chapter 12

Victory

We are continuing in our study of principles that are involved in godly living. We believe that as you study the Bible you will find out elements, aspects, that will occur when a person walks in the will of God, in what we call godly living or spiritual living.

So much of living develops in the form of conflict that blessedness always includes an element of victory. This aspect of conflict appears even in relation to the inanimate elements in the environment, even what you would commonly think of as "dead stuff." Inasmuch as living manifests movement, something of displacement is involved. For anything to move from here to there, or to move from this place to that place, something else may often have to be moved out of the way. That which moves comes in conflict in the form of collision with that which is already there, and is stationary. And even the moving elements resist change of direction. If they are moving in one direction, they do not want to move in the other direction. It is the same with change of tempo or speed (if they are moving slowly, they do not want to move fast, and if they are moving fast, they do not want to be slowed down) because of the basic inertia which seems to be a form of momentum. If this is all new to you and strange to you, we can sum it up by saying that in this world as things are and as movements take place, there is often opposition. The whole universe seems naturally to be committed to the status quo. If there are not going to be any movements, there would not be any opposition. If there is going to be any moving from here to there, something is going to have to get out of the way. The whole universe seems to want to leave things as they are. It resists even in passive fashion any force that tends to alter the way things are, which we call the "status quo."

But conflict is more easily and more commonly recognized when the units involved are animate beings, living things. This can be readily seen as between humans and animals, causing the problem of taming and domesticating the animal. Conflict is most clearly noticeable between human beings. Different reasons are operative, but for our interest we may well focus our attention upon the conflict that is inherently present between the flesh and the spirit, right within an individual himself. Because there is in him that which is going one way and that which is going another way, he is beset with conflict.

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 5:17).

This is no doubt the deep cause for conflict between carnal and spiritual believers, which can appear from time to time in specific problems. We find that people carnally minded are on one side and people spiritually minded are on the other side of particular issues as they may come up. But this conflict is actually inspired by the difference in the respective attitudes and values of flesh and spirit. However, though the conflict is easily identified as occurring in clashes between carnal believers and spiritual believers, the fact is that the more serious aspect is to be found actually within the experience of the individual believer himself.

The conflict which can be so easily recognized in the event of personal clashes between the carnal believer and spiritual believer is actually more significant when it occurs within the individual. In any church, in any congregation, there will be conflict between some people who want to live obedient to God and others who want to carry out their own ideas. Spiritually minded people will try to do certain

things that they think will be pleasing to God. There will be some other believers who apparently just want to get to heaven. They are not particular about doing the will of God down here on earth. They would like to do as they please here. They would like to do what they want to do. It is true they have joined the church. In fact they may have professed faith in God just because they did not want to go to hell. Because they did not want to go to hell, they accepted Christ; but now they just wish to be left alone and allowed to do as they please. Actually the Bible does not allow this. Between such carnal believers, believers who are influenced by the will of the flesh, by their own wishes, and spiritually minded believers who are actually interested in doing the will of God, there is naturally a conflict. However that conflict is more significant when it occurs inside the individual himself.

The persistent character of this conflict can be seen when it is related to the antagonism and the hostility that exists in the spiritual world between Christ and Satan. In this world there are forces that move to act in line with God's will, and there are forces that move to act contrary to God's will. Commonly speaking, we think of Christ as the one who will do the will of His Father, and Satan is the one who will oppose everything that Christ does and will seek to destroy it.

The Scriptures seem to reveal that when God created the world, He created man in His own image so that His Son could joy in the fellowship of a multitude of souls under God. Satan appeared in the world and maliciously tempted man that man should disobey God, and thus thwart God's original design for blessed communion in eternal life. If the devil could have his way, men would not be in fellowship with God. If Christ Jesus could have His way, men would be reconciled to God. All men should be conscious of the fact that they are involved. Man is no match for Satan in the spiritual warfare that is being waged for his soul. Men cannot stand up to the devil. The devil is too smart for him. He is too cunning. Satan is cunning and persistent. He knows something of the weakness of man and of man's proclivity to sin, his tendency to do wrong, and his selfish indulgence in ambition and pride. God allows Satan to approach man with temptation. The situation would be hopeless for man if it were not for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who "though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (II Corinthians 8:9).

The conflict is unavoidable, but defeat is unnecessary. Believers will have to fight, but they do not have to lose. They can actually win. Because Christ Jesus has won the victory, believers can triumph over the forces of the world, over the flesh and over the devil. Paul has described the equipment believers should have in this conflict in the book of Ephesians, chapter 6, verses 10 to 18. Believers can be equipped to enter that spiritual warfare; and Paul has assured us that "God always causes us to triumph in Christ Jesus."

One basic truth about man is implied in the Scriptures. "It is not good for man to be alone." This is true on every level of human affairs, and it is significantly true in spiritual life. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20).

This truth is vividly illustrated in an incident that occurred in the exodus of Israel. In their journey across the desert the Hebrews were harassed by a malicious foe, Amalek, who followed the children of Israel and cut off the stragglers. On one occasion, Moses sent Joshua to lead his soldiers to engage Amalek in battle, in face to face conflict. In that battle, Amalek had superior power, so that he could prevail over Joshua. Moses went to the top of a nearby mountain to pray for God's help for Joshua. As long as Moses held up his hand in prayer, Joshua prevailed over Amalek.

But Moses became tired. When he lowered his weary arms, Joshua was being defeated. Then Aaron and Hur came to aid Moses. They rolled up a stone for Moses to sit on, and they held up his arms until the going down of the sun. Joshua won a notable victory over Amalek. This whole event demonstrates

dramatically that united intercessory prayer is involved in victory over the forces of the enemy. That has so much to teach us and this is very important in the promotion of godly living.

The believer faces not only the natural inertia of the flesh which does not want to go in the way of self-denial, and the perverse tendencies in himself because of sin; but he also faces a malicious hostile cunning foe in Satan, who is persistently seeking to destroy him. Peter warns the believer:

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world (I Peter 5:8-9).

James writes an encouraging word:

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you (James 4:7).

I cannot miss this opportunity to share a statement that speaks assurance to my heart. Many and many a time I have returned to these simple words with joy:

"Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees."

Victory is possible: in fact it is promised; but only in the Lord. Conflict is inevitable. We cannot escape it. The believer in himself is weak. But the Lord has promised "never to leave nor to forsake" him. Godly living can have an expectation of triumph because "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (I John 4:4). May every one of you who read these words know what it is to turn to the Lord and lay hold upon Him. If you will resist the devil, he will flee from you. If you will look to the Lord, he will help you. Victory is possible by the grace of God and to Him be all the praise and the glory.

Chapter 13

Judgment

We are continuing in our study of major principles that are practiced in godly living. We have in mind that every believer will want to be well pleasing in the sight of God. We call godly living the kind of living a person does when he walks in the will of God. Godly living will always be something else and different than natural human experience. As long as the believer is in this world, the flesh will be very real.

Something of the truth in this situation for the believer can be seen when one considers the activity of walking. When I walk, I am actually exercising a triumph in which I employ my muscular strength to overcome the pull of gravity that constantly pulls my avoirdupois down to the ground. For instance, if I just stumble and fall I would not need to throw myself down or push myself down. All I would need to do is just to let myself go. I can fall without any design or effort. That is the way in living. As long as I am in my physical body, I am in the flesh, as Paul says. The flesh is pre-disposed to seek my own satisfactions. I do not need to decide to seek my own desires, or to look for my own way. Such tendencies are in me naturally. Paul could write: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing. . . . (Romans 7:18) This is the common experience of every one of us, and because this is so, living in the will of God involves a constant overcoming of my natural self.

Despite my acceptance of Christ Jesus as my Savior and my Lord, and my commitment to follow Him as He leads, the "old man" in me continues to seek his own desires. Sometimes I think it is almost as though my flesh had not heard what I decided to do. It does not pay any attention to me. It still wants its own way. Because of my imperfect understanding of all that is involved in walking with the Lord, and because of the subtle deception by which my flesh continues to seek its own satisfaction, my obedience to my Lord is not total, it is not complete. In some areas, I may continue to indulge myself and in some situations I may actually scheme to follow my own desires and ambitions.

And so there can be times when the situation demands that judgment must be executed. While it is true that the flesh must always be denied, and that my will must always be surrendered to the living Lord, there can be times when some specific issue must be dealt with drastically. The course of godly living is featured by a continuous war between flesh and spirit. It is a war in which there are many battles. Accepting Christ Jesus as Savior may begin in a crisis but it goes on in a process. And that process may not be one continuous unbroken consistent obedience. No. Being I am as I am, the kind of being I am, issues may develop and situations may arise where some battle must again be won. At times it is almost discouraging to any of us to realize that no matter how we have yielded ourselves, no matter how we purposed in our hearts to do the will of God: we wanted to be well pleasing in His sight, we did not want to do our own way; it is amazing how just around the corner we can find ourselves in situations where we begin to do as we please and find afterwards that this was not pleasing to God.

This is clearly shown in the history of Israel during the exodus. The leadership of Moses was obviously significant when the Hebrews forsook Egypt. If it had not been for him, they could not have gotten out of there. He instructed the people how to share in the Passover, and he was responsible in the crossing of the Red Sea. At the bitter water of Marah, in the coming of the manna, in the smiting of the rock to supply water, in the battle with Amalek, and in the countless problems of living together in the camp, Moses was the acknowledged leader. But when he was gone to the top of Mount Sinai for forty days, the people yielded to their own misgivings, and turned back in their hearts to the ways of Egypt.

Aaron, the chief priest, was carried along in their popular relapse into the pagan practices of Egypt. He led them in their making a golden calf to worship, and in their resumption of religious practices which they had known in Egypt. The integrity of Moses was tested when God proposed to him that the children of Israel should be destroyed for their disobedience, and God would make out of Moses a new nation. But Moses "stood in the breach" and prayed to God that He should not destroy Israel for His own name's sake. God heard that prayer but told Moses that nevertheless, Israel must be judged. What was wrong must be repudiated. The people must again be challenged to submit themselves to the will of God. This had been done before; but in their disobedience the people had broken this relationship. Thus they needed to renew their commitment.

Moses brought the whole problem to a dramatic issue when he displayed the wrath of God by shattering the tablets of stone on which the Ten Words had been inscribed by the finger of God. He then confronted Aaron and demanded confession of Aaron's sin in yielding to the wishes of the people. Moses demanded the destruction of the golden calf. Moses insisted that Aaron grind the calf down to powder, dissolve the powder, and then drink the liquid. That was really in a sense "rubbing it in." This is what Moses did to Aaron. We are talking about great men of God. We are talking about leaders. We often think about Aaron as something less because he was not as great as Moses, which was true. But Moses was such an overshadowing mountain peak, that Aaron beside him was scarcely noticed: but Aaron was a great man, a great believer. He was made the High Priest. But here Moses confronted him, and demanded that Aaron confess his sin in yielding to the wishes of the people. Moses also demanded the destruction of the golden calf. It was not enough that they turn away from the calf. They were to destroy it.

Many years ago I had occasion to deal with a man who was caught in the snare of gambling. He gambled with cards. Many of us prayed for him, and worked with him. When he showed some signs of repentance and of improvement, I wanted him to destroy the cards. I asked him to burn a pack of cards in front of his eyes to see it, but he hesitated. He did not want to do that. He tried to imply he did not need to do that, because he was perfectly able in himself to quit. You know what happened? He went right back to card playing. I do not know whether in his lifetime he ever got free.

Moses demanded that Aaron destroy this calf, this symbol of their disobedience. Moses then insisted on a direct showdown with all the people, in which each person had to take his stand for or against the will of God. All who lined up in opposition to Moses were destroyed. This drastic judgment resulted in a reinstatement of Israel in the gracious purposes of God who promised to go with them on their further journey into the promised land. The implications are plain: "Judgment must begin at the house of God." Such instances of judgment may not come every day, but when the need develops, any day, judgment is essential. If I find myself going over to one side too far, I need to turn back on the road; and that turnback needs to be done deliberately. Jesus of Nazareth taught that if the eye was leading a soul into sin, it should be plucked out (Matthew 18:8-9). Many people who are so ready to think of the Lord Jesus as a gentle, kindly person may have a problem with these words. I often wonder what they can do with them.

Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh! Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire (Matthew 18:7-9).

I do not have time now to discuss these words more fully. I would be afraid if I did I might yield to

the temptation to tone it down. And may the Lord forgive me! We need to let it stand just the way He put it. That is the gentle Jesus that we appreciate. Believe me, when it came to sin, there was nothing gentle about the way the Lord Jesus felt about that.

The branch that is not fruitful is to be removed by pruning, as you read in John 15:6. Peter warned "And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear" (I Peter 1:17). I cannot help but have deep down in my heart an earnest prayer to God. May God be gracious to us! May He give us the grace when the time comes and the issue arises, when we see that we have fallen into some snare by following our own wishes, to judge ourselves that we might not be judged.

Chapter 14

Doing Right

There is a basic righteousness in godly living. We are thinking about the major principles that are involved in walking with the Lord. We could call this spiritual living. I am speaking of it as godly living: walking in the ways of God. Just now we are going to think about the fact that there is in living in the way of God a certain basic righteousness.

In our last study we noted the sobering reality of the negative aspect of judgment which is necessary when a believer deviates from the will of God in his conduct. Now we can turn to the more inspiring, positive, aspect of right living.

In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul describes the procedure a believer can follow by which he can avoid doing wrong. It is wonderful to realize there is a procedure to follow by which the believer can avoid doing wrong. It is really amazingly simple. The way to avoid doing the wrong thing is to do the right thing. Thus the way to avoid lying, no matter what a person's habitual lifestyle may have been, is to tell the truth. The way to avoid stealing from a man is to share your goods with him. The way to avoid using God's name in vain is to practice praying out loud. The way to avoid bitterness is to practice kindness.

It is one of the weaknesses of the human being that he may not know what is right. There is never any problem about doing wrong, that does not need to be learned. One only needs to act as he wants to act naturally, and all forms of evil will develop without special attention. Like weeds in the garden, evil actions will just appear. But to do right is not so simple.

Any act is right when it is in God's will. One could say: an action is right when that act is like God. But the human heart does not know what God is like. To help willing persons act right God revealed to Moses the Ten Words on Mount Sinai. These we commonly call the Ten Commandments. Deeper insight will enable one to see that the Ten Words were expressed mainly in negative form. Whereas, living must be done positively. I wonder if I can make that a little clearer when I point out to you that a fence along the highway in a mountainous area can be very helpful. The fence marks the limits beyond which you cannot drive with safety. But you cannot drive on the fence. You drive on the pavement. The pavement is where the car runs, but the fence marks the limit beyond which you ought not to go. So it is with the law. The law is the limit beyond which you ought not to go. So that, while the Ten Words were expressed mainly in negative form ("Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal . . .") living must be done positively. For the believer this is possible because the Holy Spirit has been given to lead the believer in his activity, in obedience to the living Lord Jesus Christ.

But we should not overlook the very important function of the Ten Commandments, which Paul calls "the law." To have the benefit of the leadership of the Lord Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, the believer needs to know the Scriptures. I am quite sure that receiving Jesus Christ as Savior, thus being born again, and receiving the Holy Spirit, will result in that person's being eagerly obedient to the will of God. But there will still be the practical problem of recognizing what would the will of God be in any given situation.

Paul writes "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24) and again ". . . by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). Obviously, the law has an actual function. By the law there is the knowledge of sin. The law will help anybody, especially a willing believer, to know what is wrong. But this is only half the truth. In order to

live a godly life a person must know what is right.

At this point, it is well to note the difference between the two principles "law" and "grace." The law is for the evildoer and will show him what is wrong. Grace is for the believer and will show him what is pleasing to God. In actual living experience "law" would naturally come first, giving the knowledge of sin; and "grace" will naturally come later, prompting the believer to do what is acceptable to God. This difference can also be seen when it is noted in actual performance. Take money for an example: the law says about money "Thou shalt not steal"; but "grace" says about money "Give to the poor." Here can be seen how grace more than "keeps" the law. I can remember when my father-in-law was helping me to grasp this idea. He brought it to my mind by simply making the statement that grace "fulfilled" the law. Then he went on to say "Grace will prompt you to do more than the law requires." I can remember that at the time I was skeptical. I did not see how that could be possible. Then he used this illustration pointing out to me that the law will say with reference to money "Don't steal"; but grace will say to me with reference to money "Take of yours and give it to the poor." Actually in that way grace fulfills the law. He described it by pointing out that grace fills the cup until it is running over, and then grace pours into the full cup so that it is running over: fulfilling the law. Grace fills to overflowing, doing infinitely more than the law demands.

Not all believers are mature in spiritual understanding. Depending upon his early life experience, an individual may have his conscience inadequately informed. A person may grow up in a community, or grow up in a home, where ideas of what should be done might not be all that they should be. A person, even a believer, might accept the idea that he is doing what he ought to do, when he is in the office on the job from 8 o'clock in the morning until 4 o'clock in the afternoon. This is what the law would require in terms of his contract with his employer. How he spends his time would not show up on his attendance record. He might spend 30 minute discussing politics or sports or gossip, but this would not show up as a deficiency on his legal report. It would show he checked in at 8 o'clock and checked out at 4 o'clock. But when he becomes spiritually sensitive because of his knowledge of Scripture, he will remember how Paul writes the servant should be working:

Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men (Ephesians 6:6-7).

And then again Paul writes in another letter:

And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men (Colossians 3:23).

"Doing right" for a believer goes far beyond the legal requirements. The Lord emphasized that when He said:

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20).

This is not impossible, nor is it too difficult, for a genuine believer. Paul explains this when he writes:

And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts (Galatians 5:24).

What hindered the person giving full time to the work was himself. He did not want to work steadily.

He dragged his heels if he was just left to himself, and had only the legal requirements in mind. He could waste a lot of time without any feeling of guilt. But when his heart and mind are sensitive to the guidance of the Lord, he will not waste any time; because everything is in the Lord's hands and is being done as unto Him. So the believer lives in godly fashion by yielding to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in him, Who activates in him the will of the living Lord Jesus Christ. We know while He was on earth it was His will: "I do always the things that please my Father"; It was His will to do whatever His Father wanted Him to do. It led Him directly to the cross for the death of His flesh.

Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).

We can always remember that the spiritually minded believer will go the "second mile" with joy!

Chapter 15

True Worship

Godly living depends on the dynamic of faith in the grace of God. Because godly living involves self-denial unto death, it is vital that such a person be convinced of life and blessedness beyond this world who wants to walk in the way of God. It is the person who is sure that he belongs to God, and who knows that God has planned to raise him from the dead, who can with confidence yield himself to lose everything, even life itself, in this world. It is the person who is sure that he will be in heaven, who can give up any advantage or possession in this world. It is the person who is sure that he will be with Christ in glory, who can take the back seat and be ignored in this world; because he is confident in his heart that he has been adopted into the family of God. The believer who has strong faith is comforted to have in mind that he is "an heir of God, a joint-heir with Jesus Christ."

Such faith in God is not innate. I mean to say, a person is not born with it. A person must acquire such faith. It is not enough to believe that God is. One must also believe that God will receive him. Such a person would be sincere and humble. In his honesty he would know that he is a sinner, and in his humility he would feel entirely unworthy. And if he knows God at all, he will know that God is of "purer eyes than to behold evil." But he will know that God is righteous, Who in judgment will remember mercy. So he will humbly come to worship Almighty God.

The problem could seem hopeless. God knows all things. God knows the man has sinned. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." And so the man could fear that death or doom is his fate. But the truth is that God will accept a substitute Sacrifice in place of the sinner. And God in His grace will provide the atoning Sacrifice for the sinner who depends on Him to do it. This is the wonderful heart of the Gospel, but any natural man would not know this unless this truth were revealed to him in the Gospel.

The ignorance of man about the grace of God is illustrated in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch in the book of Acts, chapter 8, verses 30-31. When Philip asked the Ethiopian "Understandest thou what thou readest?" he replied "How can I, except some man should guide me?" This can be seen again in the case of the Centurion, who was "a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always" (Acts 10:2). But despite his sincere devotion to God, he did not know the grace of God. When Peter expounded this truth of the grace of God to him, the Centurion believed; and he was given the Holy Spirit from God.

The structure of the truth of the saving grace of God was revealed to the children of Israel in the building of the tabernacle during the Exodus, and later in the temple in Jerusalem. The whole approach of the sinner to God can be clearly seen in this pattern which was shown to Moses on Mount Sinai. The several articles of furniture and their arrangements were designed to reveal the truth of salvation, as it is indicated in Hebrews, chapter 9.

In coming to God the sinner would come first to the altar outside the tabernacle bringing his living sacrifice, perhaps a lamb, or a goat or a bird with him. The sinner would place his hands on the head of the lamb, and confess his sins. By this gesture it was indicated that the sins of the worshipper were now transferred to that innocent lamb. The priest would then kill the lamb, and take its blood into the tabernacle, to sprinkle the blood on the several articles of furniture.

The worshipper would then move forward to the laver filled with water. Here the worshipper would be washed; this symbolized that the defilement of sin would be washed away after the confession of sin and the sacrifice at the altar. Now forgiven because of confession and the death of the substitute, and

cleansed because of the washing at the laver, the worshipper is prepared to move forward to enter the sanctuary. As he enters the sanctuary, which we may think of as getting close to the very presence of God, there is on his left a seven-branched candlestick indicating he is to know the truth of God's grace, as light would shine into his soul. Light illuminates. When the worshipper is forgiven and cleansed he can see the grace of God.

To his right stood a table that bore on it a pot of manna called the shewbread. This reminded him of his daily dependence upon God's grace, just the way he depended upon the manna daily for food. He was to depend upon God's grace everyday, that he might serve God acceptably.

Immediately in front of him was a smaller table with an incense burner, in which incense was burning filling the sanctuary with sweet perfume. The Scriptures tell us that the incense represented the praise and thanksgiving of the worshipper, who now has been forgiven, cleansed, illumined and strengthened daily. This was called the altar of incense. We are accustomed in our day and time to thanksgiving services. It is not unusual to have community wide thanksgiving services at our national time of Thanksgiving. I often feel that whereas many deplore the fact that people do not feel much like thanking God, this could often be true because they do not fully understand what should precede thanking God. Actually thanking God is not because of the daily benefits round about us, which may be very great. It is not because day in and day out we are strengthened and enabled to go about our usual work, though this is quite true. There is actually something much deeper and more profound for which we should thank God. We should thank God for forgiveness, for cleansing, for being shown His grace and mercy, and for being strengthened by His grace. Such a person who is thus blessed can come into the presence of God with a heart filled with thanksgiving. This would be at the altar of incense.

Next in his approach the worshipper came to the veil which was a heavy curtain, which blocked the way into the holy of holies. Once a year the high priest entered through the veil into the holy of holies, where the ark and the mercy seat were. There God would meet the worshipper and commune with him "as a man speaks with his friend."

In this structured pattern the approach to God in the Gospel is to be seen. The sinner comes to the cross of Calvary confessing his sins: there he is forgiven and his sins are taken away. Studying the Scripture the sinner is cleansed from the defilement of his sins. As the Lord said "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" (John 15:3). Then the forgiven, cleansed sinner understands "the entrance of thy word giveth light." And so just as that candlestick would beam the light upon the worshipper coming into the tabernacle, so the Word of God sheds light to the truth of God into the heart. Then after this the believer would feed on the Word of God as Israel fed on the manna. After this the believer comes before God with thanksgiving and praise, as it is written in Scripture: "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise."

We should note that the believer does not start that way. He starts from the beginning with a sense of his own sinfulness, which is the truth; and he comes before God to confess it. Step by step he is brought to this place where he is now forgiven, cleansed, illumined so that he understands; strengthened by the grace of God so that he is able, and now he enters into the courts of God with thanksgiving and praise.

Because the veil was taken away in Christ's death on Calvary, the believer whom the world calls the "Christian" may now come boldly unto the throne of grace and find grace to help in time of need. Godly living will prosper as the atoning work of Christ is understood.

Chapter 16

Discrimination

This series of studies has been planned to note what has been revealed in Scripture about principles of procedure that will promote godly living. How would a person go about living in the will of God? The testimony of believers clearly emphasizes that blessing from God will enrich the experience of any who will walk in obedience to the will of God. By godly living I mean a lifestyle in which the consciousness of the person, and the conduct of the individual, is directly involved with the presence and the will of God. This involvement of actually being in God's presence and being in His will will be the consequence of certain steps taken by the believer, of certain measures that he has employed to bring himself into fellowship with God. In other words, nobody, not even a good person, stumbles into doing God's will. That is not how it happens.

Walking with God is not natural. It demands a certain yielding of personal liberty into the will of God by surrendering oneself to His guidance. It leads the person into denial of self which is not agreeable to the natural heart. It accepts the will of God in a heart-felt desire to be well pleasing in the sight of God. This requires self control which must be developed through a discipline of natural impulses.

The ways of God are not the ways of man. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord" (Isaiah 55:8). This means that what man might accept as satisfactory, God may not regard as satisfactory. Things are varied. Some things will do; some things will not do. Some things are right; some things are wrong. This world has in it both food and poison. Some things will help; some things will harm. Babies do not recognize differences. The capacity to note differences is born in us, but that capacity needs to be exercised. It needs to be trained.

The essence of intelligence is to make distinctions where there are real differences. Differences are real. The ability to recognize these actual differences, and the practice of making distinctions in dealing with such matters, is what intelligence is all about. This is what I mean by discrimination, seeing things carefully as they really are; and then selecting the better option as it is recognized.

Because it is natural to see all things as similar, so that I feel free to choose any option as it may suit me, a person needs to develop a sense of comparison. The history of Israel in the Exodus affords an illustration of such conditioning of the mind. The concept of "clean versus unclean" was established by a series of negative commands. The boundaries of any particular property, your lot or your farm or your yard, may be uncertain, until a fence is erected. The fence interferes with free traffic, that is true. It is definitely negative. It says "you stop here." It distinctly means that there are two separate areas: this is "here," and that is "there."

Such a separation may seem arbitrary, but it is definite. Moses introduced separating regulations in matters of food, dress, custom and conduct. What was deemed acceptable was called "clean," and what was deemed unacceptable was called "unclean." There was to be a complete separation between the two.

Certain foods were named and labelled as "unclean." All other food was "clean." There were certain ways of offering a sacrifice that were specified as "clean." Any other way was "unclean." The "unclean" thing was not to be offered to God.

Not only were there specific designations and descriptions of what was "clean" and what was "unclean," but serious penalties were provided for doing anything that was "unclean." Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, brought strange fire to the altar in their sacrifices; and the result was the shocking experience of fire coming out of the altar and destroying Nadab and Abihu. The significance of this was

emphasized by the specific order from God that Aaron should not mourn their deaths. They had done something that offended God, and thus their fate was deserved.

Every person naturally exercises discrimination in daily living. Not everything that looks inviting is fit to eat. Since there is poison in the world, one must be careful about food and drink. Not every bridge is safe for my car. Not every man who wants to sell me a car is reliable. Not every ball which the pitcher throws up to me at the plate is within the strike zone. There is a right way to spell the words I use in my letter, and I must learn that right way. Nothing else will be acceptable. In all these instances, common ordinary events in life, discrimination is being exercised.

Discrimination is a mood of evaluation: it is an attitude of appraisal. Paul urges the Thessalonians "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (that word "prove" means test them out, try them out) (I Thessalonians 5:21). Jesus of Nazareth taught His disciples "Take heed that no man deceive you" (Matthew 24:4). How could one take heed? A person needs to think over what is said, and needs to check on it. The believer must at all times be in control of himself, so that he can "go" or "stop" at will.

Discrimination belongs to maturity. Babies do not have it. Also it belongs to civilization. In many respects, savages do not have this kind of discrimination. Basically all the customs and the courtesies that belong to refined living are essentially functions of discrimination. This is what makes for music and the arts. All the keys are there on the piano keyboard, but you do not have music by banging them all. You have to select. This is the basic element that is involved in any skill or competence of any kind.

It is an alarming condition in our time that the public demands discrimination in every discipline of performance by which our health and actions are advanced and secured, whereas, at the same time in all matters that are educational, moral or spiritual, it is the unfortunate tendency of the day that discrimination is despised and blocked. This must be intelligently watched lest we be deceived. You cannot just take everything the way it appears. You cannot accept everything everybody says or anybody says. We are not supposed to do that.

A person needs to be on guard. In the matter of godly living, in the matter of walking in the ways of the Lord: to be able to walk in godliness, we must, I must, have in mind this injunction from the Lord: "Let no man deceive you by any means." We can pray Almighty God to make us aware of the dangers of being deceived, and also to be aware of the importance of selecting the right thing and doing the right thing. If a believer will keep that in mind, the Lord will help him to be aware of the chances he might take wherein he could easily be fooled.

Chapter 17

Born Again

We are continuing now in our study of various aspects of the revelation of God in the Scriptures that would guide us into godly living. We have been discussing one aspect after another of the principles that are involved in godly living. One of the most profound revelations set forth in Scripture that has bearing on this whole problem of godly living, was spoken by Jesus of Nazareth Himself, when Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, came to Him by night. Apparently, Nicodemus was puzzled in trying to understand the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. We have no specific report of what Jesus of Nazareth was saying when Nicodemus heard Him, but it seems right to think that He was teaching then as He always taught, as is reported by Matthew in chapters 5, 6 and 7, which we ordinarily call the "Sermon on the Mount." There Jesus of Nazareth plainly declared that true, acceptable righteousness before God would have to be from the heart, because outward conformity would not be acceptable.

The teaching of Jesus of Nazareth made it plain that heart-felt obedience to the law of God would involve self-denial even unto death. The godly man would give his first loyalty to Almighty God, even to the point of disposing of his possessions, as in the case of the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:21), or to relegating his devotion to his own family to a secondary importance (Matthew 8:21, 22; 10:34-38), as in the case of the young man who wanted to be a disciple. Nicodemus could not understand how the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth could ever be practical, because such demands were simply too drastic for anyone to be able to perform them conscientiously.

Nicodemus admitted that Jesus of Nazareth was "a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2). Nicodemus himself was a sincere, honest man before God: but he was frankly unable to see how such teaching could ever be effectual. It is worthy of note here that Nicodemus was not particularly impressed by any argument or any impressive words that Jesus of Nazareth might have employed; whereas he was impressed and affected by the effects of the ministry. Jesus of Nazareth performed miracles beyond what any man could perform. God must be with Him. Then how could He teach such impossible doctrine? Nicodemus could not see how any guidance that required total self-denial could ever be practical when it was offered to men.

Jesus of Nazareth answered him very simply: "Ye must be born again." Nicodemus was right in sensing that any natural sane person would not follow instructions that called for the total denial of self. It is an old truism "Self preservation is the first law of nature." But the truth was that there should be a second birth.

However, the second birth would not be a re-run of the first birth. The plan is not that with a fresh start the man could now do better. It was not only to be new but it was to be different. Jesus of Nazareth went on to explain that that which is born of the flesh is flesh, but that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Then He emphasized "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

In the Kingdom of God, God's will is obeyed. Jesus of Nazareth Himself exemplified this perfectly. And in obeying God, Jesus of Nazareth yielded His flesh to die on the cross. As a matter of fact that was the very course He was obliged to follow. In Gethsemane, He faced the cruel truth: it was necessary that His flesh die that He might be raised from the dead to make salvation possible for us.

Thus is recorded/revealed to all a basic principle in godly living. Jesus of Nazareth taught "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). A little

reflection will show clearly how this principle will work in every crisis where personal self-interest might be involved.

This was the reason the rich young ruler went away sorrowful. As a natural person he could not willingly give away the possessions that meant so much to him. If he had been born again of the Holy Spirit his interests would have been in spiritual things rather than in material possessions.

Godly living would be featured by obedience to the will of God as revealed by the Holy Spirit. That would mean a basic desire to be well pleasing in the sight of God rather than in the sight of man would be in the heart of the believer. This is the very essence of what we call godly living: an inward, urgent hunger to be well pleasing in the sight of God rather than in the sight of man. Such a desire would not be natural, but it would be spiritual.

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:7-8).

That is putting it very plainly and very straightforward. As long as we are in the flesh, it will be impossible for us to walk in the will of God. It is like a man trying to get rid of his own shadow. He cannot do it. It would be impossible for a natural man to actually, deliberately, take a course of action which would mean blotting himself out. It would be contradictory to every interest that he had. But this is what is required. Thus we can see why Jesus of Nazareth pointed out that this is possible because the new birth is possible.

The godly man will be subject to the higher Power. He will obey the laws of the land in this world because he will inwardly obey the guidance from the living Lord Jesus Christ. This is what Jesus Christ did when He was here. He rendered unto Caesar the things that were Caesar's. This the godly man will do because he is not acting naturally. He is acting spiritually. He has reckoned himself to be dead in the flesh but alive in the Spirit. Because he reckons himself to be dead in the flesh, it does not present any insurmountable obstacle to him if he is required to yield. His flesh does not matter anyway, so he can yield. This may sound almost too simple, but it is the truth.

As long as I am on my own, I naturally want to conserve as much of me as I possibly can. No matter how inclined I am to yield, I will always try to save a little bit of myself, because I will want to keep on going. If I once get it into my heart and mind that I am not any longer personally involved, I can deny myself. I am through with it. I am crucified with Christ. Of course I live, but I live in Christ Jesus.

The godly man will seek the welfare and the blessing of others. Being dead in the flesh himself, he is free to respond as led by the Lord. Thus when he is strong, he will bear the infirmities of the weak and not seek to please himself. If anybody has ever dealt with a weak person, he will know that he has to put out, put out, put out. He never gets anything back. That weak person cannot help him. What will keep him going? What will keep him putting out? "The love of Christ constraineth us." When he has it in heart and mind that he is not actually giving himself away anyway, because he has given himself to God, he can yield himself in any situation to help the other man. Any self sacrifice involved is part of the whole deal. He has already yielded himself to God.

With no self-seeking in his own heart, the believer will be able to respect those in authority. He will be considerate of those who are his equals. He will esteem others better than himself. He will be kind to the poor. This righteousness will be in him as a gift from God.

Chapter 18

Self Denial

In seeking to understand what is involved in godly living, the student's attention is focused upon the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Though He was the Son of God, He was made in all points like as we are, "yet without sin." The Scripture records that He learned obedience by the things which He suffered (Hebrews 5:8).

We know that the voice from heaven was heard at His baptism, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Jesus of Nazareth said about Himself "And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that, please him" (John 8:29). The Old Testament prophet said about the Messiah that when He was reviled, He reviled not again; and that when He was falsely accused, He answered not a word. All this gives us some idea of His manner of life.

When Jesus of Nazareth was teaching about following Him, He stated it plainly "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). This would mean denying self more than one time. It might be done the first time in a single crisis, but it would continue to be done in a process of denying self again and again.

To live a godly life involves more than one big decision to surrender to the living Lord, and to "reckon oneself dead indeed unto sin" and "alive unto God." It is based upon a general attitude of denying self in any situation. The issue would come up again and again because all the varied interests aroused in living challenge us. Our interests would lead us into doing things that would suit us; and the believer who wants to walk with the Lord must again and again and again deny himself.

The godly man will think that God has a plan for his life, even if he cannot be sure that he is aware of what God has in mind. Even if it should be that I did not know what God wanted me to do, I could be very well satisfied in my heart and mind that God would have something in mind that I should do. The believer may not know what tomorrow will bring to him, but he can be confident that God knows. Because of this the believer is not disposed to act on his own incomplete knowledge and imperfect judgment. Naturally that is the way he would act. As a human being that is the way he would do. He would act according to what he saw and according to what he thought. But if he is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and believes in Almighty God, he will be aware of the fact that his knowledge is incomplete, and his judgment is imperfect. He will want to know what is the mind of God. It would be his intention to yield to the will of God. Because the living Lord is related to all believers as the Head of the Body, the believer will live by yielding to the will of the Lord Jesus Christ as a member of His body.

One of the direct practical results of self-denial is a practice of giving thanks always in everything. Rather than acting naturally in ascribing all conduct to himself, the believer will be aware that God is the author of all that happens. So he will thank God in every situation for His wisdom and His grace.

In the same frame of mind, the believer will submit himself to other believers. This amounts generally to accepting all other persons as they are, and seeking humbly to cooperate with them in adjusting himself wherever necessary to work in harmony with his fellow believers. He will have to deny himself to do it. As he is around with other people, he is naturally inclined to think "Where do I come in? Where do I get off? What do I get out of it?" That would be very natural. But as a believer he will understand that what involves him is not his business, it belongs to the Lord. So for a believer to yield himself to the Lord it will mean that privately, deep down inside his heart, he will be saying "No, no, no, no. Not what I think, but what God thinks."

The believer will obey all rules and regulations that apply to him in any situation where he is involved. He understands the powers that be are ordained of God, and so he accepts the civil government, the government of the country, as of God. In his church relationships he is ready to accept whatever guidance comes from those in authority. Since he allows himself no personal aim, and no personal ambition, he has no difficulty in conducting himself in humility, yielding to the situation as it opens up before him. The believer is led in his heart to love the brethren. By the way, that will mean he will love them even when they are not lovable. If he loved them when they were lovable, that would be no sign of spiritual grace. But when he loves them anyway (it is so helpful to me to remember that the word "love" does not mean like: he does not have to like them, but to love them. He seeks their welfare. He wants them to be blessed and helped), he will seek to promote the welfare of the other believers and their happiness. Toward such as are his equals he will manifest consideration, "each esteeming other better than themselves." But toward such as may be somehow at a disadvantage, he will exercise charity. He will be kind to the poor. He will be thoughtful about those who are in trouble and in confusion.

As to himself the believer will be careful to "avoid all fleshly lusts which war against the soul." Paul seems to feel that this will be done when the believer reckons himself "to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:11). That phrase, "dead indeed unto sin" means not only that when anything is seen as sinful the believer will turn away from it, but it also means that he will turn away from those things in which sin occurs even before it shows up. How can this be done? I can keep in mind that my way of doing things, my ideas about things are prone to produce evil. Just as sure as I live, if I am a human being and I have ideas of my own, they will lead me astray. When I say that I am reckoning myself to be dead indeed unto sin, I mean I am checking out. I am not going to take up that which I personally want or what I personally think because I can be sure they are sinful. Paul knew from personal experience the losing battle anyone has when contending against his natural desires in his own strength (Romans 7:14-24). No one can get away from himself, and this is what Paul had in mind. He could not get away from himself in his own strength. But Paul knew, also, the glorious victory made possible through the risen Lord by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:11). He found out it was possible to yield himself to the Lord, and the Lord would work out His will in him.

There are many more blessings the believer will have as he lives in self-denial trusting in the Lord. Honesty in all relationships will follow when the interests of self are denied. It is a simple way to put it, but what I am saying is that if I allow myself to have interest in anything, I am going to color it to my advantage. As surely as anything, I will reach for the thing that I think will set me up. For me to be perfectly honest in all relationships with others, it will require on my part that I deny myself, and the interests of myself at the very outset. Even in his attitude toward his own loved ones in his own home, the believer will want God's will to prevail in the confidence that God doeth all things well. Since God's will does not change, the spiritual believer does not change: this is the ground for his consistent reliability. You can depend on him as long as he does not have any personal interest of his own. He will manifest cheerfulness in every situation because all fear of the future is taken away in the assurance of God's favor at all times. It is characteristic of this believing person that he rejoices in the good fortune of others. Since he is not in competition with anybody, he can hear of the success of other people with gladness. May the Lord help us humbly in ourselves to yield ourselves into His will trusting in Him.

Chapter 19

Yielded

We are continuing our study about what the Bible reveals about the principles that will be operative when a believer wants to live a godly life: that is to say, to really enter into the will of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. In our last study we were thinking together concerning the importance of self-denial. Now closely involved with the exercise of self denial is the deeper exercise of yielding. In self denying the focus of attention is upon the self, which has interests of its own, desires and aims of its own, which are not naturally in line with God's will. Even when the Holy Spirit within the believer brings to the consciousness some aspect of the will of God, the believer has his flesh, his own human nature in which the self is lodged. The flesh has desires and interests which do not coincide with, nor do they lead into the will of God. Thus it comes as a necessary action on the part of the believer "abstaining from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." Now we shall see that there is still another exercise even more elementary than self denial.

Godly living is practised in a context where the human being believes in God. There is no such thing as godly living in the human being himself, by the human being doing his own thing. That does not result in godly living. That is human exercise. When we think about godly living, we are naturally thinking about the believer in relation to God, and God's working in the believer to will and to do His good pleasure. Just as believers are saved by faith, so believers live by faith. The believer gratefully receives the grace of God in Christ Jesus which reconciles him to God, so that the believing soul has "peace with God"; but the believer also has "access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." The believer cannot only rest assured that his Savior has borne away his sins, but he can joyfully accept the privilege of being helped day by day to walk in the will of God.

There is one simple though very profound condition that must be met. God does not show His will to anyone who is uncertain in this matter of obedience to God. We have no evidence to lead us to think that God will show His will to anybody who is not going to obey Him. God knows whether I am going to obey Him or not. He will show His will to the person who is obedient. As Almighty God, He is sovereign in all His ways: He does not "cast pearls before swine." He knows the human heart, and so He knows whether I am willing to do His will. Jesus of Nazareth taught "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine" (John 7:17). The implication seems very plain that if a man is not willing to do the will of God, he will never know what God wants him to do. It appears that my yielding myself to do His will, is actually prerequisite to my learning what He wants me to do. If I want to know what God wants me to do, let me face first this question: "Would I do it? Would I yield myself to Him?"

Jesus of Nazareth said "I do always the things that please my Father." Yet it appeared that in Gethsemane He faced the challenge of the will of His Father in yielding Himself to die. He did not want to go through with that from a human point of view. He asked His Father if it were possible for that cup to pass from Him, but then He made this basic commitment, "Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done." This would be not so much that it was a new or different idea, than what He had before, but it was a further and a special occasion in which God lead Him to do this particular thing.

The actual fulfillment of Christ's yielding was manifested in His burial. He willingly accepted from His Father the assignment that would put Him in the grave. We should remember that He was God. He could say "Therefore doth my Father love me, 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. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it

again" (John 10:17-18). You and I are to understand that of His own free will and accord, in the presence of His Father He yielded Himself to the will of God, even though it was going to mean that He was going to the grave. He willingly accepted from His Father this assignment. In all His earthly career Jesus of Nazareth willingly accepted His course in obedience to His Father's will.

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).

Herein we can see the source of that dynamic that would strengthen any believer to yield himself into the will of God, even though he had no idea what to expect in any specific situation that he might encounter.

Such yielding does not need to be blind nor entirely without reason. The believer can keep in mind the ground for confidence in God.

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? (Romans 8:32)

Since he knows that, the believer can yield himself to God. This gives the believer ground to expect God to be gracious. When the believer remembers that God is all wise, that God knows everything, the believer can yield himself into the course of action which seems to be what God wants him to do. When he remembers that God is almighty, the believer can rest assured that "nothing is impossible with God." So he can be willing to yield himself into the hand of God even though he does not know where it is going to lead.

Yielding for the believer is actually first of all a matter of relaxing in the arms of his heavenly Father. He knows that "underneath are the everlasting arms." The idea of God's "carrying" or "bearing with" the believer's inconsistent course of action is not really a surprise to anyone who has considered the ways of God. The quality of the testimony given by sincere believers everywhere, together with the witness of their character and their word, strongly supports basic trust in God.

God's ways are "past finding out" so that no one could intelligently choose his course of action on the ground that he knows what God would do. But when he has in mind what has been revealed in Jesus Christ, he has sufficient reason to be positive in his commitment to follow the guidance of God.

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Joshua 24:15). Abraham set the pattern for such yielding when he committed himself to obey God.

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went (Hebrews 11:8).

Certainly the way of godly living is the way of obedience, but the deeper ground for such obedience is a settled purpose that overrules all things:

"Not my will, but Thine be done."

Chapter 20

The Holy Spirit

We have been studying now for some time about what the Bible reveals about the major principles that are involved in promoting godly living. Nothing much has been noted about the superiority of this way of life. We have not argued about it. There is no doubt this is better living, but that is never the basis of the choice the believer makes. He does not choose to live godly because that will put him ahead. The believer does not live in godly fashion because it is to his advantage to do so. He is not motivated by comparing godly living to other lifestyles. He is not so much practical, nor political, nor covetous, as he is obedient. Actually, the facts are that he has accepted Christ Jesus as his Savior and Lord to escape condemnation and destruction. In doing this he chose to ignore self, to deny self, and all selfish interests that he might "win" Christ, as Paul expressed it in Philippians, chapter 3, verse 8.

When the believer accepted Christ Jesus, he joined himself to the Savior in His death on the cross. That is where it started. The believer shared with Christ the total disregard of self when he was "buried with Him in baptism." So the believer rose with Him "in newness of life" when he was regenerated by the grace and the power of God. This new life is oriented in God. What I mean to say is, this new life would never occur apart from God. The believer actually involves himself with God when he sets out to walk in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Into the regenerated heart, God sends forth His Holy Spirit, Who comes into the believer to dwell with him as a Comforter and a Companion. The Holy Spirit takes the things of Christ and shows them to the believer. I think it is a good thing to have in mind that many times the believer may not even be so very conscious of the very fact that it is the Holy Spirit doing it. What the believer finds out is that he will be thinking the things of Christ. Thus the believer becomes conscious of the indwelling presence of God, "Christ in you the hope of glory." The Spirit knows the mind of God, both the Father and the Son, and inclines the heart of the believer to obey God's will. The function of the Holy Spirit is to activate the will of the living Lord Jesus Christ in the believer, so that the believer finds himself "ambitious to be well pleasing in His sight" when he is thinking about God.

Thus the motivation to live and to act in godly fashion is grounded in the presence of the Holy Spirit, dwelling in the heart of the believer. It is not because this is the most effectual procedure to achieve love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control (even though it is the only way to have those virtues), but it is because the attention of the soul is focused upon the living Lord Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave Himself for us. Actually, the fruit of the Spirit, those nine virtues mentioned above, is more like a fringe benefit. That is the consequence of turning to God but never the reason why we turn. We turn to God because He gave Himself for us.

This summer my wife is enjoying a fine display of zinnias beside our carport entrance. These lovely, bright flowers are the result, not of planting the flowers in the ground or of fastening them upon stakes, but of planting dry bits of what looked like bits of dried leaves in the moist earth. These were the seeds. I can tell you right now it is a far cry from the seed of a zinnia plant to the bright flower that comes out of it. Spiritual living is as simple and as profound as that. My wife planted those dry seeds in the soil and in due time zinnias are there in all their glory. Any believer can have in mind that is the way it is going to take place in us. We may not even know how glorious it is, but God knows when He sees in us the working of the Lord Jesus Christ.

One does not promote love by thinking of how he would act if he loved, and then trying to live that

way. A believer promotes love in his heart by looking at Christ Jesus giving Himself for me.

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

The origin of love in my heart or in your heart is not grounded in the loveliness of others, nor in the sweetness of our human hearts. It is not that I am just naturally a good person, and I am letting it come out. Love springs from Christ Jesus giving Himself to die for me. It is not that I imitate Him, but it is that I receive Him into my heart and yield to His will. He is above all else minded to please His Father: this involves obeying His Father's commandments and seeking the welfare and happiness of others, who are His Father's creatures. I do not seek to help others because they are needy, nor because I am generous; but because they are God's creatures and I am God's child who wants to please Him. In this discussion I am attempting to set our whole thinking in the very presence of God. Joy is not the result of favorable circumstances, nor of my personal bright, cheerful disposition.

Joy is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in me showing me the things of Christ. The Son of God had His own joy in communion with His heavenly Father. It is this joy which wells up in the heart of the believer because the Holy Spirit shows him the things of Jesus Christ. Joy in the Lord is thus not dependent upon events, not dependent upon possibilities, or upon personal effort or personal disposition, but upon the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. The believer has joy not because of what he does or what he is, but because the joy of the Lord is manifested in him by the Holy Spirit. The believer does not do right and thus have joy, but he has joy and thus he does right.

Peace is not the result of quiet circumstances, freedom from fear, hunger and want; but it is the gift of God in and through Jesus Christ. It is the person who believes in Jesus Christ and is thus justified before God, reconciled to God, and sharing communion with God who is persuaded that if God spared not His own Son but freely gave Him up for us all, then God will surely with Him give us all things. The soul that has peace with God seeks peace with all men.

Such is the truth of godly living. "It is God who worketh in you to will and to do of His good pleasure." There is no strain, no stress, no striving, but a joyful responding to "the love of God which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5:5).

I cannot help but feel as I have been talking along that some of you will feel that I am almost living on another plane, another sphere. My dear person, whoever you may be, you may have in mind that this is what the Holy Scriptures will tell you. This is God's will for you. Does it not give you some lift and some help to realize that circumstances can never interfere with your relationship with God? I know that circumstances change and times change and people change and the world changes, and there are many, many things around us that are dissatisfying. Some things will never be right. As long as we live they will not be right. But let me point out once more that it is not because they will ever be right, or that they will ever be good, or that I will ever be right, or that I will ever be good, nor that everybody else is going to be right and everybody else is going to be good: that is not it. It is because Christ Jesus is right and good, and He gave Himself for me. He has made Himself available to me. The whole truth of the Lord Jesus Christ is brought into my heart by the presence of the Holy Spirit of God whom God gives freely to anybody, "whosoever will come unto him" and who will receive the Holy Spirit of God. We praise His Holy Name.

I trust as we have gone through these studies together there may have been in your hearts some encouragement as well as some resolution within yourself that you are going to yield yourself to the

Lord and let Him do as He will in you. When it is God working in you to will and to do of His good pleasure, your life will show the fruits of the Holy Spirit to the glory of God.