

Just for You!

~by Richard A. Bennett.

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Preface

“Just for You” is what happens when a person encounters and receives the ‘Just’ One, our Lord Jesus Christ into their life. At which time they become—because of His precious shed blood—‘just’ in Him! Then, through a life of total dependence upon the Lord, we are to live a life centered in Him as—“Just for You!”



“The Abasing Thorn”

Chapter One

Reports from the mission field, and many effective centers of Christian witness, reveal that God’s blessing can often be accompanied by alarming counter-attacks of the enemy. This, however, is not an experience peculiar to our generation.

A scriptural and historic study of a Christian’s progress, reveals that the greater the spiritual privilege, the greater the satanic pressure!

This was true of the Apostle Paul who, throughout Christian history, was blessed in excess of most men. Paul spoke of the abundance of the ‘revelations’ committed to him. However, with such revelations, there also came a

“messenger of Satan,” lest he should be “exalted above measure.”

As we further consider the twelfth chapter of second Corinthians, we will particularly notice that God never removed Paul’s thorn but always gave His enabling grace.

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

“It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

*“Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me. And lest I should be **exalted above measure** through the*

abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.

“Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

For over 14 years, Paul carried with him,

THE ABIDING VISION

This ecstatic spiritual experience was peculiar to Paul and he had been reticent to inform others of its character and, certainly had studied to avoid all boastful reference to it by deliberately engaging in the language of the third person as previously mentioned in,

2 Corinthians 12:1-4

“It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in

Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.

“And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”

Indeed, God forbade Paul to describe his vision. Yes, even today, we are still in ignorance as to its essential nature. However, we can be sure it was a lofty privilege given of God to Paul!

In reference to his vision, it has been speculated that Paul equated it with one of the recounted instances of when he received direct communication from heaven. Whether this be the fact or whether the reference is to an experience omitted from the Acts of the Apostles, we do not know. However, we do know that there were occasions when Paul received special blessing and help from heaven. These involved Paul’s conversion experience and his vital communion with the Lord Jesus Christ.

During Paul's Conversion

Acts 9:3-6

“And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

“And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.”

The brilliant ‘*light*,’ with its resultant effect upon his optical senses, arresting him on the road to Damascus, might have been the occasion of his ecstasy. Paul continually delighted in reflecting upon this unique experience and later he said:

Acts 22:11

“I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.”

During Paul's Communion

Acts 22:17-18

“And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; And saw Him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me.”

This exceptional ‘quiet time instruction,’ was used for God to manifest Himself in an unusual way and forewarn Paul of the hazards awaiting him when he proceeded to Jerusalem.

It might have been on either or neither of these occasions that Paul was, as he described, ‘transported.’

2 Corinthians 12:3, 4, 7

“And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise [third heaven] and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter . . . And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given

to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

Together with Paul's personal doubt as to, physical or spiritual transportation, cause his experience to stand out as intriguing if not unique!

That said, to a lesser degree; let us remember that as Christians we have daily blessings and privileges that God ministers to each believer: At our conversion, during our personal 'quiet times' and, when we worship the Lord together with other believers.

The lesson that we learn from each situation is that, such privileges and spiritual blessings are often counter-balanced by 'God-allowed' difficulties. Frequently, as Christians, we encounter trials but tend to forget that we have the privilege of entering 'heavenly places' and invoking the Lord's spiritual blessings. Through our Lord Jesus alone, we can triumph over every temptation.

1 Corinthians 10:13

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer

you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”

With the ‘Abiding Vision,’ there comes an:

ABASING THORN

2 Corinthians 12:5-8

*“Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me. And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me **a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.** For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.”*

We may well ask, what was the ‘*thorn*’ that troubled Paul? In the absence of specific mention in the Bible, we can only speculate. There are three main trends of thought, but we cannot be dogmatic.

Difficulty in Paul's Speech

Galatians 4:13-14

“Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And . . . ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.”

We might not always observe another person's headache but, there was probably something unusual about Paul's comportment that drew the attention of others.

Galatians 4:13

“His intense desire to get the message of the gospel of Christ across was hindered by the things which exposed him to ridicule, and tended to make the saying unacceptable to those who were not under the spell of his extreme earnestness.”

Paul's serious eye problems would also be a tremendous handicap to his desire of widely publishing God's truth.

Difficulty in Paul's Sight

Galatians 4:15

“Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand.” Similarly, Paul's amazing declaration of

the love of the brethren towards him, caused him to write,

Galatians 6:11,

“If it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them unto me.”

Difficulty in Self-Control

While Paul never refers to any particular grossness in unconverted days, this might have been Paul’s continual reminder of his utter uselessness apart from Christ’s indwelling life when he wrote:

Romans 7:8

“Sin... wrought in me all manner of concupiscence.”

1 Corinthians 9:27

“. . . I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway”

Romans 7:23

“. . . I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.”

The Bible does not record what Paul’s ‘thorn’ was. Men have hazarded guesses, yet the Holy Spirit has chosen to

keep it from us in order that we might console ourselves that Paul himself may have trodden the same ‘thorny road’ of our particular problem.

I am sure that John Wesley, with his domestic difficulties, was strengthened when he read these scriptures. In addition, I am sure that John Sung, with his neurotic nature, was strengthened, as would also be David Brainerd in his physical frailty.

From the time of Job, to believers of our present day, many have experienced a “*messenger of Satan to buffet,*” only to prove that, those whom the Lord exalts He also abases! God does not lead us around “Hill Difficulty,” but always leads us over!

With ‘The Abasing Thorn,’ we have:

THE ABUNDANT GRACE

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

“And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take

pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

Do you also know the promise of His grace to carry you through whatever your ‘thorn’ may be?

Romans 5:20

“Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” This can be more fully experienced when we:

Appreciate the Purpose

2 Corinthians 12:7

“Lest I should be exalted above measure.”

Remember that your ‘*thorn*’ is for your ultimate good and is a necessary part of the privilege of blessing. Every difficulty is a further proof of God’s purpose prevailing for our good, even though it means the necessity of our brokenness to bring us to ‘the valley of humiliation’.

James 4:6

“But He giveth more grace. Wherefore He saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”

Accept the Privilege

2 Corinthians 12: 9-10

“Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

The complaining or discontented life is the powerless life!

Nehemiah 8:10

“. . . neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

John Bunyan, writing of 12 years’ imprisonment said, “I never had, in all my life, so great an insight into the Word of God as now.” “I have often said, were it lawful, I could pray for greater trouble for the greater comfort’s sake!”

Appropriate the Power

2 Corinthians 12:9

“My strength is made perfect in weakness . . . that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” The Apostle Paul knew that, above all else, the enabling power of Christ rested upon him.

This, can also, be our experience as we hear afresh from heaven: *“My grace is sufficient for thee.”* When finally I recognize and, even when I am prepared to rejoice in my weakness, then at last He will be able to manifest His mighty power in this life of mine.

John 1:14

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth”

Ephesians 2:8

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”

Ephesians 4:7

“But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.”

1 Peter 4:10 *“As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”*

“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.”

2 Peter 3:18



Chapter Two

Awe and wonder, mixed with thanksgiving and relief, fill the hearts of parents when their precious little baby is delivered. Yes, there are 10 toes and 10 fingers! However, with the baby's delivery, the task of parenting has only just begun. A little baby is the only thing out of which the Lord can make a man or a woman of God. Yes, *life begets life!*

Even little babies know how to lie! They will cry as if they are in pain when all the time what they want is attention. All of us have sinned because we were born sinners. However, at the new birth there is another delivery.

Colossians 1:12-14

*“Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: **Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son: In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins”***

When in later life the son or daughter is born-again, for the godly parent, there is no greater joy because **Life begets life!**

The normal expression of life, whether physical or spiritual, is that life reproduces itself. In a local church, both the pastor and the congregation are vital in the transmission of ‘Life’ to people who are spiritually dead. However, the reality of the number of people genuinely born-again in any church tells us more of the congregation than it does of the pastor.

THE PROPHET

God said to the prophet Ezekiel that he was to be a ‘watchman’ to the house of Israel.

Ezekiel 33:7

“I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the words of My mouth, and warn them from Me.”

The prophet Habakkuk was also called of God to be a ‘watchman’ and that same radical message given in his day, needs to be heralded today! It will ‘not cut the mustard’ when a mild-mannered man stands before mild-mannered people and tells them how to become more mild-mannered! Although to sprinkle homiletic lavender water over the congregation may please some people, it will not bring them to a new life in Christ Jesus our Lord!

To announce the presence of sin

Ezekiel 33:8

“When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.”

Before a doctor can prescribe a treatment, he must first make a diagnosis of the problem. Why is it then that in a ‘user-friendly’ church they endeavor to discreetly avoid

giving offense by eluding the themes of sin, repentance and Hell?

As with Habakkuk, so today, the solemn pronouncement of sin is the vital foundation message of Gospel preaching.

Romans 3:23 *“All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”* The renowned late Charles Haddon Spurgeon explained how the pulpit can easily become a ‘coward’s castle,’ and so it is when the theme of personal sin is omitted!

To denounce the practice of sin

Ezekiel 33:11

“Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”

When speaking of the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus said,

John 16:8-11

“And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment of sin, because they believe not on Me; Of righteousness, because I go to My

Father, and ye see Me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.”

It is only when people are thoroughly convicted of their sin that they will gladly respond to the “*Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*” **John 1:29**.

Then, the theme of repentance is an essential element of saving faith. Space does not allow all the scriptural references to the **absolute necessity of repentance** which are recorded throughout the Old and New Testaments. Some of which can be found in the ministry of John the Baptist; in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ; in the preaching of Peter on the Day of Pentecost; in the preaching of the Apostles and in the messages of our Risen Christ to the seven churches in His Revelation.

To pronounce the punishment of sin

Ezekiel 33:11

“Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”

When did you last hear a sermon that warned the people of the reality of Hell—that awful place of eternal punishment and darkness?

Recently, I heard an interview of a man who had volunteered to help psychologists research the result of a person who was ‘shut up’ in a room of absolute darkness and silence for three days and three nights. Within the first hour, this man told how he became totally disoriented. When walking across the room, he measured the distance by counting his steps. With no knowledge of the passage of time, he measured how long his beard had grown and tried to calculate whether it was time to go to bed. In total darkness and silence for three days and three nights, he became an emotional and physical wreck.

In comparison, eternal darkness and torment is forever, and it is the obligation of every believer to warn Christ-rejecters of their personal need to know the Lord Jesus. He alone can rescue the perishing. He is waiting for available lives to work through by His enabling power!

The Apostle Paul’s message was all about the Lord Jesus. He was never intimidated from boldly proclaiming,

I Corinthians 15:3, 4

“For I delivered unto you, first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins [a vicarious death] according to the Scriptures [a verified death] and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day [a victorious death] according to the scriptures.”

THE PEOPLE

Many believers hear the Gospel proclaimed by their faithful pastor. However, for some, the pastor is preaching as if he were fishing in a ‘fish-and-chip’ shop—because the ‘fish’ have already been caught and the unsaved are not being reached!

Ephesians 4:8, 11

“When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men . . . He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists and some pastor/teachers.”

When God gave the Church the gift of evangelists and pastor/teachers, it was for the “*perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry*” **Ephesians 4:12.**

A very well-known British evangelist and pastor, who had led thousands of people to Christ, including myself, expounded these verses to a Sunday morning congregation. After the service, an emotional deacon approached him and said, “Pastor, did I understand you correctly when you said that we ourselves should become pastors and evangelists?” “That is not what I said,” replied the pastor. “That is what the Bible teaches.” “Then why do we pay you?” replied the deacon. “You pay me to give me the privilege to train you to do my job. And if I fail there, I might as well sell potatoes, because I am a failure as a pastor.”

Dorothy and I have sometimes heard people say, “God has given you the gift of an evangelist, but I do not have that gift.” The important reason is seldom understood as to why God gives these gifts. Accordingly, they believe that their exclusive part in the task of evangelism is only fulfilled when they support their pastor/teacher, a missionary or an evangelist. This often results in an ‘evangelical smorgasbord’ where people take their pick of the various ministry ‘delicacies’ that are being offered.

Even in the prevailing humanistic, agnostic and socialistic atmosphere in England, unconverted people were attracted to certain churches. Why was this? It was not to hear some ‘special preacher’ or ‘musical presentation’ or even ‘to find friends’. Instead, it was because members of the church congregation had permeated their professional and work responsibilities with a glowing testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ!

On the day of Pentecost, it was the laity, filled with the wonder of the resurrection of Christ that infiltrated the multitudes and talked of Jesus, resulting in thousands of people being drawn to hear the preaching of the Apostle Peter. Speaking to His disciples, the Lord Jesus said,

“Ye are the salt of the earth” **Matthew 5:13**. Salt creates thirst and thirsty people will readily respond to the source of water! The Lord Jesus told us in,

Revelation 21:5, 6

“And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And He said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will

give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.”

We might ask why there is so little spiritual thirst in our present day. The answer is that there is not enough salt permeating society!

Sadly, when many of us do try to present the Gospel to neighbors, relatives and work colleagues, we are like ‘bald-headed barbers’ trying to sell hair-restorer. A life that is overflowing with the love of Jesus does not say, “You need what I’ve got, come to my church.” Rather, when people are exposed to ‘salt’ they say, “You’ve got what I need, where can I find water?”

Some people might think, “I know I’ve been born-again. I know His indwelling has radically changed my behavior patterns. I really do believe the Lord Jesus is my Savior. However, to be honest, I do not sense my testimony is creating spiritual thirst among my neighbors and friends. What can I do?”

It is not by first taking a course on personal evangelism – that may come later. It is, however, by learning the secret

of ‘Withdrawal,’ as unto the Lord, before ‘Returning’ with His burning message within. God exhorts each believer to ‘withdraw’ from the world’s value systems, the pleasure priorities, the financial pressures of the day and to hear His voice through His Word. In turn, we will have a message to share for others when we ‘return’ to them from our quiet time with the Lord.

The Prophet Habakkuk knew this living relationship with the Lord when he wrote,

Habakkuk 2:1

“I will stand upon my watch, and set myself upon the tower [his withdrawal] and will watch to see what He will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.”

In the place of ‘withdrawal’ from the lawless, violent, and sexually immoral society in his day, God gave Habakkuk an astonishing message, of which many of us might be familiar. Habakkuk recorded in chapter 2:4, ***“The just shall live by his faith.”***

However, before this life-transforming message was ever penned, Habakkuk first issued a somber warning.

“Behold, his soul, which is lifted up is not upright in him . . . he is a proud man” Habakkuk 2:4-5.

Pride is the antithesis of faith.

Always the ‘self-confident’ man feels no need of the help of another. Pride is independent of the sufficiency of the indwelling Christ to accomplish the task. This is the essence of unbelief. However, faith is neither credulity nor presumption: **Faith is affirmed by an act that counts eternal truth as fact!**

The Lord Jesus said, *“Without Me ye can do nothing” John 15:5.* The corollary of this truth is in the testimony of the Apostle Paul, *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” Philippians 4:13.* That is faith!

After listening to a sermon or to a Bible teacher, what do you do with the knowledge you have gained? Does it become intellectual fodder, or do you internalize it through faith and obedience? If, in the place of private prayer, what you hear is not personalized, it will quickly dissipate. However, when truth becomes part of your spiritual digestive system, you will want to share it. “What I keep, I lose! What I share, I keep!”

Jeremiah 20:9

“Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name. But His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.”

In our early days of ministry in England, Dorothy and I followed the witness of vibrant Christians into businesses, hospitals, colleges and universities. They had invited their business associates and colleagues to join them for coffee and to listen to a visiting Christian speaker. Day after day, we had the privilege of leading people to Christ in their secular world.

From that ministry, churches across the UK invited us to conduct series of evangelistic services. By way of preparation, I suggested preliminary ministry: Three days I would expound biblical principles of evangelism and for two days I would explain how these principles would be put into practice. This entailed each church member would commit themselves to pray daily for the conversion of five people—neighbors, friends and unconverted family members. Then contact each of those individuals with a

loving invitation to their home and share when they were born-again and what the Lord Jesus meant in their daily life. Some people go to church to be saved, and other people will not go to church until they are saved!

I will quote from our newsletter following this ministry: “For the past 12 months, the church members [35] had been meeting weekly in prayer groups to seek God’s blessing on their friends. Contacts were made, friendships were cultivated and, by the time we arrived, there was a spirit of expectancy. Totally out of the routine of this fellowship, one lady had already been converted and baptized even before the meetings began!

“Morning coffees and afternoon teas were held in the homes of the women members of the church. These were attended by neighbors and there over 20 ladies found new life in Christ. One lady—a known alcoholic—who had been receiving treatment, was wonderfully ‘born again.’

“After all these meetings, the 52 converts were invited to church for a ‘follow-up’ tea. Among them were people converted in the various homes, in the businessmen’s

breakfasts and luncheons. Around the informality of the tea table, they were urged to share in a “say so” session!

“One glowing testimony followed another as people spoke of their new-found life in Christ. One Elder’s wife, who was a hostess at the ‘tea,’ interrupted the flow of testimonies by saying, ‘For many years I have approached visiting speakers to ask for help because I lacked assurance of my salvation. But today, as I have listened to these testimonies, I realized it was not ‘assurance’ I needed, it was new Life in Christ and I have just been born-again!’

“Later, when the lady’s husband returned home from work, seeing her radiant face he said, ‘My dear, whatever happened to you tonight?’ She responded, ‘I’ve just been born-again!’”

John 10:10

“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

Let us personally respond by prayer to the words of the hymn by Frances Ridley Havergal.

Lord, speak to me that I may speak
In living echoes of Thy tone;
As Thou has sought, so let me seek
Thine erring children lost and lone.

O teach me, Lord, that I may teach
The precious things Thou dost impart;
And wing my words, that they may reach
The hidden depths of many a heart.

O fill me with Thy fullness, Lord,
Until my very heart o'erflow
In kindling thought and glowing word,
Thy love to tell, Thy praise to show.

O lead me, Lord, that I may lead
The wandering and the wavering feet;
O feed me, Lord, that I may feed
Thy hungering ones with manna sweet.

O use me, Lord, use even me,
Just as Thou wilt, and when, and where,
Until Thy blessed face I see,
Thy rest, Thy joy, Thy glory share!

Spiritual Check-up

* In my place of private prayer, does Bible truth go seven inches lower from my 'head' to my 'heart' by my prompt act of obedience, faith and worship?

* Do I see people as living souls for whom Christ died, and am I available to reach them with His love and life? [Remember, love does not let people fall into the fire!]

* When did I last have a conversation with somebody outside my family and friends with the deliberate purpose of leading that person to Christ?

“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

John 10:10



*There's a Crack in
the Liberty Bell!*

Chapter three

Millions of liberty lovers from around the world have seen and touched the historic America's Liberty Bell. Some years ago Dorothy and I were among them. Our hands skimmed her surface and our fingers verified the crack was there! At that time we were fascinated to watch little boys, both black and white, tap their knuckles against the metal with the hope of hearing it ring again. But the old 'Lady of Liberty' refused to sing!

On July 8, 1776, after the first public reading of the 'Declaration of Independence,' this famous bell, now located in Independence Square, was enthusiastically rung to the citizens of Philadelphia. Fifty-nine years later

she was silenced forever when a crack appeared on her surface. Later, attempts to restore her melody failed. The drilling of the hairline fracture to make it wider and then to weld in an identical alloy proved futile. Though robbed of her audible ring, today the Liberty Bell still heralds a mute but meaningful message. Eternal words of truth and hope are embossed in metal on the cone of the bell. They are quoted from the Word of God as found in:

Leviticus 25:1, 8-12

“And the LORD spake unto Moses in mount Sinai, saying, . . . And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years.

Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family.

A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be unto you: ye shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of thy vine undressed. For it is the jubilee; it shall be holy unto you: ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field.”

For the Israelites, the Year of Jubilee was celebrated every 50th year. At that time the injustices of the secular society were to be redressed: Slaves were to be set free; all debts were to be discharged; any lost inheritance was to be restored and, exiles were to return home. Surely, many people, who had been oppressed and bereft, must have longed to hear the trumpet blow as it introduced the Year of Jubilee!

However, for the Israelites, the proclamation of liberty was preceded by God-given restraints. **“Liberty” did not imply “license.”** The moral guidelines were:

- i) *“Thou shalt not approach unto a woman to uncover her nakedness ...”* [playboy morality] **Leviticus 18:19.**
- ii). *“Thou shalt not lie carnally with thy neighbor’s wife”* [adultery] **Leviticus 18:20.**

iii) *“Thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I AM the Lord”* [abortion and blasphemy] **Leviticus 22:21.**

iv.) *“Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind: it is abomination [homosexuality] Neither shalt thou lie with any beast to defile thyself therewith: neither shall any woman stand before a beast to lie down thereto: it is confusion”* **Leviticus 18:22, 23.**

Though by God’s grace, liberty was announced to the Israelites, God clarified that to break His prescribed prohibition would result in inevitable judgment. This is still true of nations as well as of individuals.

Sadly, the moral climate in America today reflects the very sins that God prohibits in any generation or in any nation. Surely, *“Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people”* **Proverbs 14:34.**

Yes, there is a crack in the Liberty Bell both literally and metaphorically! Just as in the New Testament, the Grace of God does not free me to do what I want without moral

restraint so, in the Old Testament, the Law does not spell condemnation to those who truly repent. To think otherwise would deny the consistency of the character of God Himself!

In our democratic society, differences of opinion can be expressed. However, sadly in America today, we witness increasing numbers of people seeking to remove God from our public arena. A well-known atheist coined the slogan: “There is no God, so enjoy yourselves!” This slogan was emblazoned on buses in several cities in the free world!

However, as we delve deeper into the cause of our moral decay, we must ask, “Just who is it that seeks to remove the mention of our Lord Jesus Christ from our public forums and educational institutions?” The answer of course is “Satan!” That “Old Serpent’s” agenda is to deceive and manipulate nations. In so doing, his goal is to become god of a one-world political system.

So, our ultimate conflict is with the foul agenda of Satan. He hates the One Who will ultimately rule this world—

our Lord Jesus—Yeshua Himself. But for now, as in

Ephesians 6:12

“...we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

As Satan continues his diabolical work, we are told that in America, suicide is the third major cause of death for 15 to 19 year-olds. Sex, drugs, alcohol and the base entertainment media are sociably acceptable. At the same time, prayer—and the mention of our Lord Jesus, is forbidden in schools and in the public arena. Little wonder that our Liberty Bell is mute!

Though some may consider the following quotation from Brannon Howse pessimistic, others might think it realistic: “We’ve lost the culture war. I wish I could tell you otherwise and go happily along with the many Christians who still think we can recapture America, return to our moral and spiritual roots, and revitalize our wayward institutions. But I can’t, and someone needs to tell you—loudly and clearly ... we are not going to

reclaim the culture in America and return to the ‘good old days’ ... The heaviest fighting is yet to come. In the midst of a lost culture, we must stand up for righteousness ... we must accept that we are past the point of restoring our culture ... we must evangelize, disciple, and raise up those who can lead the remnant.”– The Berean Call 2/10. In this connection, the Bible warns:

Colossians 2:8

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”

Yes, though ‘the Liberty Bell’ is forever quiet, praise God, other bells ring loud and clear! That ‘liberty’ is depicted by an understanding of the golden bells that were attached to the high priest’s robe as explained in:

Exodus 28:31-35

And thou shalt make the robe of the ephod all of blue. And there shall be an hole in the top of it, in the midst thereof: it shall have a binding of woven work round about the hole of it, as it were the hole of an habergeon, that it be not rent. And beneath upon the hem of it thou shalt make

pomegranates of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, round about the hem thereof; and bells of gold between them round about: A golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, upon the hem of the robe round about. And it shall be upon Aaron to minister: and his sound shall be heard when he goeth in unto the holy place before the LORD, and when he cometh out, that he die not.”

Golden Bells—Good News



Golden bells were interspersed with pomegranates around the hem of the garment of the high priest. The high priest is a picture of our Great High Priest—the Lord Jesus Christ. Pomegranates portray His fruitfulness on our behalf. Golden bells ring with the glad news that atonement for sin has been accomplished. While atonement for sin in the Old Testament meant sin was covered for another year, in the New Testament it means sin is removed forever. ‘Tetelestai’—It is finished!

Once every year, clothed in his robe, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies: *“And it shall be upon Aaron*

to minister: and his sound shall be heard when he goeth in unto the holy place before the Lord, and when he cometh out, that he die not” Exodus 28:35.

Outside the Tabernacle, the people waited with bated breath. They heard the golden bells ring when the high priest, with the blood of the sacrifice, entered into the Holy of Holies. There, he encountered the fearsome holiness and glory of God. Such was His awesome holiness that the high priest would die if God did not accept the Blood sacrifice as an atonement for sin. Understandably then, there was great excitement when eventually the high priest emerged. Gladly they heard the golden bells ring. The blood had been accepted on the Mercy Seat and their sin had been covered for another year!

Later, it was our Great High Priest—the Lord Jesus Christ—Who shed His Precious Blood. He conquered death, and ascended to the Holiest of Holies in Heaven! Was His Precious Blood accepted by the Father? Yes, a thousand times yes!

Today, true liberty is found in the indwelling reality of the risen Lord Jesus Christ Who becomes the dynamic of His own demands. The Apostle Paul wrote: *“Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God”* **Romans 8:21.**

Jesus, as Perfect Man, returned to the Holiest of Holies in Heaven and there His Blood was accepted by the Father as the full atonement for your sin and mine. Accordingly, on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was released from Heaven: *“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind”* **Acts 2:2.** So, the Holy Spirit commenced His ministry on earth in a new way to reproduce the life of Christ in the heart of every Blood-bought child of God!

Even in the darkest hour His purposes of blessing continue to be outworked through available believers. Soon, we pray, the Church will be complete and we eagerly anticipate the Golden Bells at His soon return when we will meet Him in the air!

Thou art coming, O my Savior,
 Thou are coming, O my King;
In Thy beauty all-resplendent,
 In Thy glory all-transcendent;
Well may we rejoice and sing.
 Coming! In the opening east
Herald brightness slowly swells;
 Coming! O my glorious Priest,
Hear we not Thy golden bells?

-Francis Ridley Havergall, 1836-79



*“Because the creature itself also shall be
delivered from the bondage of corruption into
the glorious liberty of the children of God”*

Romans 8:21.

*Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy;
break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the
LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.*
- *Hosea 10:12 (KJV)* -

Break up your Fallow Ground

Chapter four

Before the seed of God's Word can flourish with penetrating authority and spiritual fruitfulness through each believer, we each need to have a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ at the Cross!

2 Corinthians 4:6

“God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in [their] hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

Galatians 6:14

“God forbid that I should glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”

Romans 6:10-12

“For in that He died, He died unto sin once; but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God. Likewise, reckon [count on it as a fact] ye, also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in its lusts.”

How easy it is for pre-conditioned ‘thorny patches’ of lust patterns to emerge in modern-day Christianity. I will amplify, with biblical illustrations, five such lust patterns which have been suggested.

Approbation Lust

As exemplified by Saul who coveted man’s approval. When he heard of the women dancing and singing the latest pop song about David, he was angrily covetous.

1Samuel 18:5-9

“And David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants.”

“And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music.

“And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day and forward.”

Saul recognized that his popularity rating was in decline. As a result, jealousy and murderous intent were born in his heart.

Details of life lust

Keeping up appearances before others and, trying to cope with the details of life in my own strength and ability, is a **form of pride**. Whereas, to wait upon the Lord to accomplish His purposes of blessing, demands humility

on my part which comes through a life of close fellowship and availability to Him!

Mary waited upon the Lord Jesus, whereas Martha her sister, was excessively occupied with hospitality details to the exclusion of her personal communion with Jesus.

Luke 10:38-42

“Now it came to pass, as they went, that He entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard His Word.

“But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to Him, and said, Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

Material Lust

As exemplified by the Church of Laodicea in the book of Revelation. The terrible lust of having that ‘little bit more’ is never satisfied and one of the greatest problems in the Western church. In comparison to the rest of the world, her relative affluence and resultant self-sufficiency is of being, ‘*increased with goods*’.

Revelation 3:14-19

“And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth.

*“Because thou sayest, I am rich, and **increased with goods**, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou*

mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.”

Power Lust

Is exemplified by Diotrephes when he coveted the prominent position in the local church and through gossip and dissent, sowed ‘infection’ about the Apostle John.

3 John 9-11

*“I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, **who loveth to have the preeminence** among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.*

“Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.”

Sensual Lust

As exemplified by David who lusted after another man’s wife and craved for sexual fulfillment outside of God’s boundaries.

2 Samuel 11: 1-4

“And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem.

“And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.

“And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her;”

The same lust pattern is also applicable to mental lust.

Galatians 5:16

“For this I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”

Jeremiah 4:1-4

“If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, return unto Me: and if thou wilt put away thine abominations out of

My sight, then shalt thou not remove. And thou shalt swear, The Lord liveth, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; and the nations shall bless themselves in Him, and in Him shall they glory.

*“For thus saith the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, **Break up your fallow ground**, and sow not among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest My fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.”*

May our daily experience be co-crucifixion with Christ so that His resurrection Life may flow like living water:

Hosea 10:12-13

*“Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; **break up your fallow ground**: for it is time to seek the Lord, till He come and rain righteousness upon you.*

“Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way ...”

This does not mean, as I used to think, that one little click in my spiritual make-up would elevate me to the rank of a ‘super sanctified’ saint. Instead, I need to daily experience a fresh infilling of His Holy Spirit so that His Resurrection Life may flow through me like living water as I obey God in every detail of life.

For me, to “***break up your fallow ground,***” demands a life of total dependence upon Him through His abundant and enabling provision so that He will receive all the glory!

*“Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy;
break up your fallow ground:
for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain
righteousness upon you.”*

Hosea 10:12



Sanctify

‘set apart for a special use or purpose’

Chapter five

What is your desire for your life? Can we answer that we want to be **‘set apart for a special use or purpose’** for the Lord? Is our daily prayer that Yeshua—the Lord Jesus, might be glorified in and through our life according to His plan and purposes?

When faced squarely with the heinousness of sin, it is thrilling to turn to the topic of ‘sanctification’ and ask the Holy Spirit to lift me to a life of useful and holy influence.

I am daily now more conscious that I have been sanctified at conversion; that I am being sanctified in my daily walk and, that one day I will be sanctified completely when I meet Him face to face!

Two Aspects of such Sanctification

The sense in which the Christian is sanctified, combines both the religious meaning - which speaks of being 'set apart' for service and implies possession: together with the ethical meaning - which speaks of being 'set apart' from sin and implies purity.

Possession: To be 'set apart' for Service

The Old Testament makes it abundantly clear that there is a sense in which 'things' can also be sanctified. Take, for instance, where God specifically commanded that people should sanctify their houses and fields as recounted in:

Leviticus 27:14-16

“And when a man shall sanctify his house to be holy unto the Lord, then the priest shall estimate it, whether it be good or bad: as the priest shall estimate it, so shall it stand. And if he that sanctified it will redeem his house, then he shall add the fifth part of the money of thy estimation unto it, and it shall be his. And if a man shall sanctify unto the Lord some part of a field of his possession, then thy estimation shall be according to the

seed thereof: an homer of barley seed shall be valued at fifty shekels of silver.”

The thought behind this, was that ‘possessions’ should be set aside for God’s purpose. *“Every devoted thing is most holy unto the Lord”* **Leviticus 27:28**. Immediately after the liberation of the children of Israel from Egypt, God commanded that all the firstborn should be set aside or ‘sanctified’:

Exodus 13:2

“Sanctify unto Me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is Mine.”

He did not mean that they should be more holy than the rest of the family, but that they should be ‘set aside’ for a specifically religious purpose.

The Lord Jesus confirms this thought when He tells us that the altar sanctifies the gift, and the temple sanctifies the gold.

Matthew 23:17-19

“Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And, whosoever shall

swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?"

They were to be set apart and they were to be dedicated. The altar was dedicated to God. The gift was of no greater consequence than the altar because it was the altar that sanctified the gift! When exhorting us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God, the Apostle Paul significantly explains that this is only possible by the Mercy of God:

Romans 12:1

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

Purity: To be 'set apart' from Sin

Immediately following Ezekiel's vision of "the valley of dry bones," we read:

Ezekiel 37:21-28

"And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen,

whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all. Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be My people, and I will be their God.

“And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever.

“Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will

place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And the heathen shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore.”

In this instance, the prophetic implications do not detract from the usage of the word, which is clearly ethical. Prior to this, the prophet speaks of evil, defilement, and idols, being taken away from Israel. When the sin that had held them low is removed, the heathen shall recognize the sanctifying power of God. It is the same thought behind God’s command to Moses in:

Leviticus 19:2

*“Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, **Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy.**”*

Thus, as the Apostle Peter takes up this refrain in his first epistle, with the command: *“Be ye holy; for I am holy,”* (1:16), we find that God is still revealing his unqualified objective in the life of every Christian. The ethical

implication is unmistakable. It is with tremendous joy we discover how this, being “set apart,” occurs.

Three Stages of Sanctification

While it may at first appear confusing to talk of sanctification as past, present and future, nevertheless, the Scriptures relate this experience of Christian living to the three tenses: We have been sanctified (if we are truly converted); we are being sanctified; and, there is yet to be a day when we will be sanctified in His holy presence!

Initially: To be ‘set apart’ from an Evil World

The ground of this initial sanctification is nothing less than ‘the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ’ and He only is *“ . . . the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.”*

Hebrews 13:12

“Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate.”

In His ‘High Priestly prayer,’ the Lord said, *“And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth”* **John17:19**. By this means, God made provision for the believer to be ‘set apart’ from a world

that is fast heading for destruction and implies the necessity to be separated unto His will, even though it means a cross! It is impossible to be separated from this wicked world apart from the shedding of His precious blood given freely to those who are ‘born again.’

The moment we trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, we were no longer ‘at home’ in this world.

Hebrews 13:13-14

Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp ... for here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come” The moment we are saved, we were set apart from an evil world. Did not the Savior say: *“They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world”* John 17:16. So why prioritize in patching up the ‘degenerating house’, rather than decorating and furnishing our future abode? May God show us that, in spite of its ever-present allure, this world is not our home!

Continually: To be ‘set apart’ from an Evil Walk

This is not optional but obligatory.

2 Timothy 2:19

“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.”

This involves being set apart from sin, while:

2 Timothy 2:21

“If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.”

For every good work involves service. Both are imperative for the Christian! So how can I live a sanctified life?

THE WORD OF GOD.

The Lord Jesus prayed: *“Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy Word is truth”* **John 17:17**. As I meet with God through His Word, I am encouraged to ‘holy living.’ This, in turn, encourages me to hunger and thirst after righteousness, as the Lord Jesus said, *“Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled”* **Matthew 5:6**. Let us daily give His Word a primary place in our hearts and homes.

2 Peter 1:4

“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

1 Peter 1:22-25

“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:

“But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.”

THE SPIRIT OF GOD.

God, in the Old Testament, is repeatedly referred to as ‘Holy.’ However, in the New Testament, the prime reference of holiness is of the Third Person of the ‘Trinity’—the Triunity—the Holy Spirit.

2 Thessalonians 2:12-14

*“. . . that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to **salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth**: Whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

It seems almost too wonderful to grasp, that God’s holiness has become available for you and me by the indwelling reality of His **Holy** Spirit. Today, we can experience the joy of being separated from an evil walk and, by the enabling power of His Holy Spirit—Who is the Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Holiness!

THE CHASTISEMENT OF GOD.

In **Psalm 119:71** we read, *“It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes.”* Did you understand that? The Psalmist rejoiced in affliction as God’s pathway to obedience and purity.

Hebrews 12:5-13

*“And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: **For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.** If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.*

“Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness.

“Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for

your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.”

Whatever His chastening hand, whether sorrow or sickness, whether distress or persecution, it is all for our sanctification. Let us learn to turn it to the purpose for which He lovingly intended. Thus, we see the glorious possibility of a consistent walk that bespeaks God’s purpose for His own children.

Ultimately: To be ‘set apart’ from An Evil Nature

If we could talk of a primary attribute of God, surely we would have to talk of His holiness. His wrath that judges and His love that redeems merely vindicate His absolute holiness. The Lord spoke unto Moses:

Leviticus 20:7, 8

“Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the Lord your God. And ye shall keep My statutes, and do them: I am the Lord which sanctify you.”

Those who have been ‘set apart’ from an evil world at the cross: are being ‘set apart’ from an evil walk through the

means of grace and are anticipating when: *“we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is”* **1 John 3:2.**

*“But know that the Lord hath
set apart
him that is godly for Himself: the Lord will
hear when I call unto Him”*

Psalm 4:3

...seek ye first the kingdom of God
and His righteousness
and all these things
will be added unto you.
(Matthew 6:33)



Chapter Six

Daily we make decisions. Each decision is important as we continue to live in transparent fellowship with the Lord Jesus. A story is told of a farm laborer who had been assigned the task of sorting out the apple harvest. He was to place the big apples in one box, the medium sized apples in another box, and the small apples in yet another box. After four days of working at this tedious task, he sought the counsel of a psychiatrist. “Doctor” he said, “I think I am on the verge of a nervous breakdown!” “Why is that?” the psychiatrist asked. “Because life is all decisions, decisions, decisions!”

However, few people realize that indecision is, in fact, a decision not to act. Dorothy and I visited the modest home of newly arrived immigrants, who, with great pride and joy, introduced us to their little girl. At great sacrifice, the parents had been able to procure various dresses for their daughter. The little girl repeatedly trotted up and down the stairs to change her outfit. She was unable to decide which one she would wear that day! Many of us approach life's decisions with the same uncertainty.

The vital question

Do opportunities and present circumstances influence the decisions of my life or, do the decisions I make before the Lord result in greater opportunities for the glory of God?

Matthew 6:25-33

“Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought

can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

“Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

*“**But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.**”*

Various Responses

The Apostle Paul confronted people living in the University city of Athens. As he preached the Gospel of

our Lord Jesus Christ, we read of the various responses from the motley throng:

Acts 17:32, 34

“When they heard of the resurrection of the dead some mocked, and others said we will hear thee again on this matter . . . nevertheless certain men joined to him and believed.”

Then, and as now, people who procrastinate in making a decision are actually saying, “I choose not to act.”

Similarly, when confronted with the challenge of acclaiming Jesus as the Lord of our life, there is a great chasm between mental assent to His Deity and authority, and, with a submissive faith, an active response to Him. Religious activity is no substitute for,

Spiritual vitality!

When you have wholeheartedly yielded to Christ as Lord in your life, your next question will be, ‘how can His Lordship be outworked in all my subsequent decisions’—such as the selection of an uncompromised career or who to marry?

How can I know what is always the right decision to make? God helps us to understand how our life can be lived in the center of His will when He said, **Matthew 11:29**

“Learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.”

Psalm 25:9

“The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way.”

The answer to the question on making **the right decisions is based in meekness** and not looking for signs in the clouds! However, you might ask, “What is meekness?” The American Heritage Dictionary defines ‘meekness’ as, “Showing patience and humility, gentleness, fully imposed upon and submissive.”

SUBMISSION

When commissioned to a worldwide biblical ministry from our church in London, England, Dorothy and I requested C. Austin Miles’ hymn to be sung - **“Submission.”** This was our expression of a deep desire for God to exercise His Lordship and direction in us.

The path that I have trod, has brought me nearer God,
Though oft it led through sorrows gates.
Though not the way I'd choose, in my way I might lose,
The joy that yet for me awaits.

[Chorus]

Not what I wish to be, nor where I wish to go.
For who am I that I should choose my way.
The Lord will choose for me, 'tis better far I know.
So let Him bid me go; or stay.

**Submission to the will, of Him who loves me still,
Is surety of His love revealed.
My soul shall rise above this world in which I move;
I conquer only when I yield.**

May I urge you to be sure that you have commenced a living relationship with God by first being 'born again.' This 'new life' is established in you the moment you receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

John 1:12.

"But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name:"

1 Peter 1:23-25

“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.”

Yes, the Word of God is eternal, but, praise God, it is also contemporary. The Holy Spirit continually makes the Bible, in which Christ is revealed, relevant to our every need; to our every failure and to every demand of life and circumstance that we could possibly face.

Whether facing domestic difficulties; work-related difficulties; social pressures; scholastic-socialism; sexual temptations or even demonic lifestyles, sooner or later, by the faithful and consecutive exposition and application of the Word of God, all these issues will be addressed in relation to the all-sufficiency of our risen Christ by His ‘Finished Work’ on our behalf at the Cross. Surely, that is good news for us today!

Once you have been ‘born again,’ His Spirit will outwork His plan and purposes through you. Therefore, the Lordship of Christ is for your life as a believer is:

Absolutely vital

Every decision you make—whether small or great—should be made in total dependence upon the indwelling and enabling power of our risen Lord Jesus.

God does not expect us to work out all the uncertainties of life through our emotions. Instead, it is absolutely vital that we realize the necessity of total submission in everything as unto the Lord Jesus Himself!

*“The meek will He guide in judgment:
and the meek will He teach His way.”*

Psalm 25:9



Chapter Seven

Both Dorothy and I are eternally grateful to God that we have been, *“Delivered ... from the power of darkness and ... translated into the kingdom of His dear Son”*

Colossians 1: 13. For those of us who have a similar testimony we can sing: “I am so glad to belong to the family of God, Born of His Spirit and washed in His blood! Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod, I am so glad to be part of the family of God.”

Praise God that, instead of being part of this ‘world system,’ we are now *“pilgrims and sojourners,”* on our way Home to Heaven!

1 Peter 2:11

*“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as **strangers and pilgrims**”*

Hebrews 11:9, 10-16

*“By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, **as in a strange country**... For he looked for a city which hath foundations, **whose builder and maker is God** ... These all ... confessed that they were **strangers and pilgrims on the earth** ... For they that say such things declare **plainly that they seek a country** ... **a better country**, that is, an heavenly ... **He hath prepared for them a city.**”*

It is comforting to know that we too are also only on a pilgrimage for a short while in a foreign land but that heaven is our Home! God has blessed us to have fellowship with other believers who are on the same pilgrimage. This family is centered in Christ when we are born of His Spirit and neither color nor country can separate us from the deep love He has given us one for the other! That is why it is our privilege to pray one for the other, desiring only their spiritual best. Eternity alone will reveal what such friendship and fellowship in Christ has meant to us in the darkest hour. Dorothy and I are most

grateful to each person who has been led of His Spirit to pray for us that we might ‘finish well’ for His glory alone. Many have gone before and we can praise the Lord that they too realized they were ‘just passing through’ this old world which no longer held any attraction to them but considered all that this world can offer as only ‘dross’ in the light of one day, face to face, worshipping the LORD!

As a boy, we used to sing a chorus: “The perfect Friend is the One who knows the worst about you and loves you just the same. There’s only One who loves like that and **the Lord Jesus is His name. His wonderful, wonderful Name!**” Sadly, at that time I only knew these as catchy words and a catchy tune and did not realize that, “*There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother*” **Proverbs 8:24**. Praise God, that today He has become so increasingly real and precious!

Your friendship and fellowship in the Gospel has always been a vital factor in the ever-expanding ministries of Cross Currents International Ministries, which the Lord has entrusted to us all. Some of our long-time friends and ministry supporters go as far back as 1958 just after

Dorothy and I were united in marriage in Richmond, Surrey, England.

Prior to my being called into the ministry of His Word, while I was still working in a civil engineering position, I redesigned the structure of a bakery owned by a Christian friend. It was in that bakery that our beautiful three-tiered iced wedding fruitcake was made and then presented to us as a wedding gift.

Around the circumference of the cake, ***“Together in My Name,”*** was embossed. The pastor, at our wedding service, charged us with the wonderful instruction: *“Together in Life: Together in Love: Together in Labor.”* Praise God, even though Dorothy has come to know “the worst about me,” she continues to live, to love and to labor with me in the Lord on a 24/7 basis. How grateful I am that, after my risen Lord, my dear Dorothy is always my very best friend!

Our ministry of togetherness in the Lord commenced immediately following our Wedding ceremony when, after our reception, we flew from London, to New York for six months of preaching engagements. This eventful

journey, with ‘family plan off-season bargain tickets,’ was made possible from funds received as wedding gifts. However, we paid dearly for such economy tickets!

After an emergency five-hour delay at Glasgow airport; a further five-hour delay in Iceland (where we saw the midnight sun) and yet another long delay at Goose Bay, Labrador, thirty-one hours later we eventually landed at Kennedy Airport! Immediately upon disembarkation, we were graciously greeted and driven to a church on Long Island where I preached and Dorothy sang, ‘Great is Thy faithfulness, O God My Father.’ Following that evening service, a lady who had been trained as an opera singer, commented to Dorothy: ‘Your voice sounded awfully tired!’ I wonder why?

This foundational core of true friendships in Christ has expanded by the addition of such cherished friends and ‘Prayer Partners’ as you. Although many have been promoted to Glory, the resultant fruit of their labors continues to reach precious lives through the ongoing missionary outreach through CCIM which will, “*abound to your account*” **Philippians 4:17**.

THORNS AND FRAGRANCE

Our prayer is that God will continue to give wide opportunities whereby we may grow in grace and in the love and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ: That we, “*redeem the time, for the days are evil*” **Ephesians 5:16.**

May He also use the ‘finishing touches’ in our lives and “*... to be conformed into the image of His Son ...*” **Romans 8:29.**

Often circumstances are difficult for us but—in His great love towards us—He brings each circumstance into our lives so that our total dependence will be upon His indwelling Life!

Early in our united ministry, a friend admonished us, ‘Give the sunshine to others; tell the Lord Jesus the rest!’ Later, when ministering for a month in Holland—at the invitation of the then Director of Dutch Television, with extension ministries to four strategic churches across the country—a dear Christian brother said, ‘In Holland we have developed roses that have no thorns; but roses that have no *thorns* have no *fragrance!*’

When the pressures of life are upon us, we can decide upon one of two alternatives: As John Bunyan allegorized, we can retreat ‘to the Valley of Despond’ which will inevitably lead to ‘Doubting Castle.’ The alternative is to reflect upon the promise of the Savior in **John 15:14**, “*Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you*” So what had He commanded? He had said:

John 15:4

*“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; **no more can ye, except ye abide in me.**”*

Yes, we can rejoice in the worst of situations when, by faith only, we prove the reality of knowing that He is totally adequate to handle every situation—pain, perplexity or problem!

Galatians 2:20

*“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless **I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.**”*

Of course, this does not mean that we glide to heaven on a flowery bed of ease. But, with King David, we can say,

Psalm 61:2-3

“When my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For Thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy.” At such times, when my heart is full of grief for having grieved my Lord because of my sin and failure—and after prayerful confession, repentance and consequent cleansing by His precious blood—I am encouraged to know, *“A just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again”* **Proverbs 24:16**.

We have also experienced the inward pain of aborted hopes. Aborted hopes when we deflected from following the clear leading and purposes of God because of the sincere ideas and suggestions of other well-meaning believers. However, in His redemptive love, God always used such ‘thorns’ as an expression of His love to goad us back to greater purposes of blessing. What a gracious God and heavenly Father we have!

Accordingly, we rejoice to know that people from over a quarter of the countries in the world as registered by the United Nations are, in their own language, downloading CCIM’s, *“missionaries in paper covers”* which include

“Your Quest for God.” No, we find no delight in the writing of a book, the translation of a book, the publishing of a book, or even in the distribution of a book. To be quite honest, over the last many years, this process has been a long time-consuming chore! However, our great delight is that, as a result, someone has received new life and encouragement in our Lord Jesus Christ!

PERFECT PEACE

While ministering on the book of Philippians in a church on the East Coast, I met a dear friend and his wife who later corresponded to share his blessings through these precious scriptures. Because of what I will disclose, they will remain anonymous. The husband recently wrote, “Thank you for your expression of love, concern and prayers with regards to my job and our health. Please receive this news in ‘the spirit of Epaphroditus’ not wanting you to be burdened with concern.” Such a tender expression of concern and love for another when facing personal crisis and difficulty moved us greatly.

This friend previously—after long employment with the same firm—was suddenly dismissed when his company

sold out to new owners. All employees were without work or benefits. Though this abrupt news had coincided with his wife's chronic and painful physical disability, he shared that they both had "perfect peace from the Lord." Then, in answer to prayer, eventually another firm employed him at a third of his former salary. Recently, coinciding with his own two painful medical procedures, he went to his office as usual only to find that this company was bankrupt and all employees released that same day without any benefits! He further wrote, "When I went home and told my wife we prayed and both had "perfect peace."

It is through such testing circumstances that the true character and faith of a person is revealed. This is what our friend wrote: "The main sadness of my heart was that I wondered if we will be able to maintain our financial ministry commitments. Also I wonder if, this side of heaven, I will ever again see the many business people I have met and ministered to as well as their families." No thought of personal distress from our friends, just a concern for others!

The verses mentioning ‘Epaphroditus’ particularly rang in my heart as the Holy Spirit caused me to reflect upon why this scripture had such an impact upon me.

It was when teaching at Capernwray Bible School, England, that I received an ominous telephone call from Dorothy’s specialist doctor. The doctor informed me of Dorothy’s life-threatening condition and warned that, even if I returned to her bedside immediately, I might never see her alive again.

It had been at Dorothy’s insistence that I should not cancel my scheduled ministry itinerary. “I’m sad enough that I cannot be with you to help in the ministry” she said, “but if you were to cancel your itinerary for me, it would break my heart.” No man is worthy of such devotion, commitment and togetherness in the ministry, least of all, me.

I hastened to Dorothy’s bedside after catching the first passenger jumbo jet flight across the Atlantic. I found her appearing to be unconscious. The doctor solemnly said: “It can only be a matter of minutes now.”

Taking my Bible I began to read to Dorothy. When I read **Philippians 2:25-27**, “*Epaphroditus . . . my companion in labor, and fellow soldier, your messenger, that ministered to my wants . . . he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy: not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow,*” that I whispered, “Dorothy, you are my Epaphroditus and my fellow soldier.” Then, I quietly added, “Would you like to be anointed with oil according to James 5:15?” Her eyes responded with a faint flicker of assent.

Amazingly, at that time the late Dr. J. Edwin Orr, who was ministering across the country, had felt strangely led to urge his wife Carol, immediately to visit Dorothy’s bedside while he quickly travelled to join her. The ‘anointing service’ was an act of obedience and, as always, the Lord was faithful. Today, praise God, by the Lord’s enabling and in answer to the prayers of friends like you, she continues to labor diligently and faithfully by my side. Yes! Dorothy continues to be my Epaphroditus!

Each believer is commissioned to bear witness of our Lord Jesus Christ Who is patiently waiting for, “*The precious fruit of the earth*” **James 5:7**.

Let us encourage each other to reaffirm the desire of the Apostle Paul: “*That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death*” **Philippians 3:10**. It is important to note that ‘the Cross’ will mean a dead-end street to my life and will imply:

‘Death’ to self-centered living, when self-interest is not only the center of my life but also its circumference!
‘Death’ to self-pity, which will produce a life of praise as unto the Lord, even in the darkest night! ‘Death’ to self-defense, when circumstances go against me! ‘Death’ to self-promotion, but, alive to a completely dependent faith upon the Lord! ‘Death’ to selfish motives, proving a “*love that seeketh not her own*” **1 Corinthians 13:5**.

Such ‘death to self’ is only possible when, at my ‘New Birth,’ I recognize that the Lord Jesus clothed Himself with my redeemed humanity and, it is the Lord—and He

alone—Who is adequate to meet and overcome every circumstance of life that I will encounter.

This impact will affect my thinking and planning and will drive me to my knees resulting in my lips loosed to share Christ with others, knowing the terrible eternal destiny of their lost souls.

When our lips, with humility but assurance, confess the Lord, we will automatically know, by the Holy Spirit, as to when to pray for others with believing praise and anticipation of His glorious outworking to our prayers.

Soon the ‘Day of Grace’ will conclude and our Lord Jesus will ‘snatch away’ His Body—the Church.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52

“Take notice, I am telling you a secret. We shall not all die but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet call. For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall all be changed.”

2 Thessalonians 4:17

“For with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and

the trumpet of God, the Lord Himself will descend from heaven, and those who died in Christ will rise first. Afterward we, the living who remain, will be caught up along with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we shall ever be with the Lord.”

Psalm 17:15

“As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness.”

Therefore, knowing the urgency of the hour let each of us respond to the loving desire of our Lord Jesus that, **“Together in My Name”** we pray for and encourage each other around the world as many believers face persecution and martyrdom.

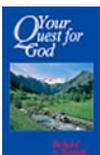
“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

Matthew 18:20

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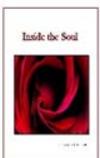
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From its initiation, one of the declared objectives of Cross Currents International Ministries is: *“To preach the Word of God the world around, particularly where there is persecution and lack of Christian privilege.”*

It is our prayer that this ministry will continue to be funded when Dorothy and I have departed this scene of action! Your help is much appreciated by many people from around the world. *Dr. Richard A. Bennett.*

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