



Days of Praise

September • October • November 2016

Days *of* Praise

Daily Bible Readings and Devotional Commentaries

September • October • November 2016

*“As the hart panteth after the water brooks,
so panteth my soul after thee, O God.”
(Psalm 42:1)*

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Introduction to
DAYS OF PRAISE

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.” (Romans 13:1)

Dear Christian friend,

This is the year when the United States elects the president and vice president and many federal senators and representatives as well. For many of us, this has been the most tumultuous election season in memory. It is certainly worth remembering that no power comes into authority without the Creator of the universe allowing such a person into position.

Often our reason fails us when the person or party seems to be in direct opposition to what we might prefer. It is in such times that we must acknowledge that God’s “thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

As you read each day’s devotional thought, let it be the dominant focus for your life that day. God’s Word is far more powerful and real than the evil that will surely impinge on your earthly life. His peace will “keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Henry M. Morris III, Chief Executive Officer

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Thursday, September 1

Stand Ye Still

“Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem . . . to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you.” (2 Chronicles 20:17)

The Ammorites and Moabites and Edomites had organized “a great multitude” seeking to destroy Judah under King Jehoshaphat. But the king and his people came together to “seek the LORD” in prayer for deliverance, and God answered. “The Spirit of the LORD” spoke through Jahaziel, assuring them that “the battle is not yours, but God’s” (see 2 Chronicles 20:2, 4, 14-15).

Then the Lord sent what may have seemed a strange instruction. “Stand ye still,” He said. Just watch God do it! And He did. All their enemies were constrained by the Lord to fight and destroy each other, without the Israelites having to fight at all. Similarly, at the Red Sea when everything looked hopeless, “Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD” (Exodus 14:13). So they did, and all Pharaoh’s armies were overthrown in the midst of the sea.

In Isaiah’s day, when Israel was tempted to call on pagan Egypt for help against pagan Assyria, God said concerning Israel’s armies, “Their strength is to sit still” (Isaiah 30:7). As the ship was being buffeted in the storm, and the sailors in panic were about to flee in the lifeboat, Paul said, “Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved” (Acts 27:31). So they stayed, and God spared every man.

There are times for action, of course, but the principle is this. When we have done all we can, and the situation seems hopeless, this is the time to sit still and trust God to work it out in His own good way. “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). Got any rivers you think are uncrossable? God specializes in things thought impossible! HMM

Friday, September 2

My Every Prayer

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy.”
(Philippians 1:3-4)

The letter to the Philippian church stands as perhaps the most personal of the epistles, with Paul’s love for the believers being obvious. He expressed his love with heartfelt prayer for them every time he thought of them.

These prayers are constant in the sense that the Philippian believers were never far from his thoughts. Often he resorted to prayer for their personal needs and their relationship to God. His prayers are described by at least two Greek words of interest to us. First, he tells that he “thanked [his] God” (Greek *eucharisteo*) each time they came to mind. To another church he similarly wrote, “I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:4). The word implies a sincere statement of genuine gratitude for their fellowship in being with him in serving God and partnership in the ministry.

Likewise, he used the word “supplication” (Greek *deesei*), an expression of gratefulness for his needs having been supplied. Paul’s needs were often provided for by those to whom he ministered, and he was profoundly grateful. The Christian minister is enjoined to remember his followers with “joy.” Paul remembered them in thankfulness to God for them and to them for their response.

We should strive to arrive at a balance between our ministry goals in evangelism and ongoing care for believers’ Christian growth and steadfast doctrinal purity. What is the state of our harmony among church members, as well as our prayers for them? JDM

Saturday, September 3

Faith, Substance, and Evidence

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1)

The 11th chapter of Hebrews, known as the great Hall of Fame of Faith reciting the faith and resulting action of many Old Testament heroes, begins with a description of what faith is.

First, we see that it is the “substance of things hoped for.” Biblically, we know that the Christian “hope” is a hope so real it has substance in the present. None of the people of faith recited in this chapter actually saw the promises made to them come to fruition, but they so believed in them that they lived in the present as if the future were reality.

The word “substance” occurs only two other times in Hebrews. It is used to speak of Christ as the exact representation of God’s essence and nature, “Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person [i.e., substance]” (Hebrews 1:3). It is also translated “confidence,” “for we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end” (Hebrews 3:14), and speaks of a deep assurance. Putting this all together, our text could then be rendered, “faith is the essence of our assurance of things yet in the future.”

The word “evidence” could be translated “conviction,” or even “proof.” The word implies a logical, airtight argument. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof [same word as ‘evidence’], for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). This sort of evidence is something we know to be true, something about which we have such conviction we act accordingly.

The first half of the verse brings a future truth down into the present; the second half commits our lives to that truth. JDM

Sunday, September 4

The Doctrine of the Few

“The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people.” (Deuteronomy 7:7)

Modern people—even Christians—tend to measure success in terms of bigness. God’s measure, on the other hand, is based on quality, not quantity. There were undoubtedly millions of people on the earth, for example, when the Flood came in the days of Noah, but only “few, that is, eight souls were saved” as the waters lifted up the Ark (1 Peter 3:20).

A few centuries after the Flood, populations had again increased, and great nations developed in Egypt, Sumeria, and elsewhere. But God called one man, Abraham, to establish a new nation, and he obeyed. Many great nations (Arabs, etc.) came from Abraham, but again God chose only one, Israel, to inherit the promise. Israel did grow, but as our text shows, even this chosen nation was nearly always insignificant compared to other nations.

In Israel’s history, many instances are recorded when God used just a few to battle many. God used Gideon’s 300 men to defeat 135,000 Midianites (Judges 7:7; 8:10). Similar deliverances occurred in the days of David, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and others.

In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus told His disciples that “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). He also said to them: “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

God’s criterion is that of motivation rather than multiplication. “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:14). But those few will be faithful servants and will someday hear Him say: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Matthew 25:21). HMM

Monday, September 5

Yokefellows

“And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.” (Philippians 4:3)

Although the word “yokefellow” is out of use today, the meaning is easily understood. Most of us know a yoke is a device that connects two animals together to increase the power for the work that needs to be done.

Jesus said, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:29-30). From a spiritual perspective, we labor together with the Lord Jesus. Among ourselves, we labor in the gospel. It is worth noting that God sees the marriage bond as “joined together” (same term) with a yoke (Matthew 19:6).

Interestingly, as Paul speaks highly of the women who “labored” with him, he uses two very different concepts to recognize their contribution. First, he describes them as *sunathleo*, or those who are “engaged in the contest” with him, like “a man also [strives] for masteries” (2 Timothy 2:5). Then Paul uses *sunergos* to describe those who have accomplished meaningful work alongside him. Titus is described as Paul’s “partner and fellowhelper” (2 Corinthians 8:23). These women had evidentially earned Paul’s respect for their commitment to the Kingdom work.

Although the picture drawn by these synonymns rests on the work aspect, surely there is the assumption that those who are yoked together are anticipating a common goal. Jesus, with “the joy that was set before him endured the [work of the] cross” (Hebrews 12:2). And we labor in the kingdom since our “names are in the book of life.” HMM III

Tuesday, September 6

Sacrifice and Service

“Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.” (Philippians 2:17)

Paul saw himself as “poured out” as an offering (Greek *spendo*) on the “sacrifice and service” of these precious friends. This special word is used only one other time, when Paul was “ready to be offered” at his death (2 Timothy 4:6).

Paul’s ministry among the Philippians resulted in the godly lifestyle of the church. They became sacrifices (Greek *thusia*) much like the Lord Jesus “hath given himself for us” (Ephesians 5:2) and as we are all told to “present [our] bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is [our] reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

The service that is commended of the Philippians is a public service undertaken at one’s own expense (Greek *leitourgia*). Several men in the church at Antioch were noted for their ministry (Acts 13:2 uses the same word), and some in Macedonia and Achaia were also acknowledged for giving contributions to the saints at Jerusalem (Romans 15:26-27).

Paul’s joy and rejoicing at the godly activity of the faithful saints at Philippi are the key to understanding the tone of the entire book. He had “poured out” himself, even being “shamefully entreated” during his ministry there (1 Thessalonians 2:2). Yet while writing this poignant letter back to the church, he gives joyful greetings to them at the certain knowledge that his ministry among them has resulted in their sacrifice and service.

Would God that all of us could see our offerings for the sake of others with the same passionate expectation. Often our Lord calls on us to give of ourselves in selfless ways so that others may learn from our example. Sometimes, we must even pour out our own souls (1 Thessalonians 2:8) for the sake of the gospel. HMM III

Wednesday, September 7

Sojourners

“For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding.” (1 Chronicles 29:15)

All of God’s people, whether ancient Israelites or latter-day Christians, need to recognize that we are mere “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13). This world is not our home, as the old gospel song puts it, and we must not let our roots get down too deep in this materialistic world.

The words of our text are in David’s last recorded prayer before his death. He was a great king and very wealthy in material things, but he still recognized that his real home was not in the earthly Jerusalem but in heaven.

So should we. The apostle Paul wrote, “For our conversation [the Greek word here literally means ‘citizenship’] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20). We are merely serving in this world as “ambassadors for Christ,” and our business here, representing the court of heaven, is to urge men, “in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Why should we spend time and money beautifying a home on Earth when Christ has gone to prepare a mansion for us in heaven (John 14:2)? Remember Abraham, who by faith “sojourned . . . in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles” (Hebrews 11:9). “But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city” (Hebrews 11:16).

Also remember Paul, who had “no certain dwellingplace” (1 Corinthians 4:11), not to mention the Lord Jesus Himself, who had “not where to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20). We do well, therefore, to “pass the time of [our] sojourning here in fear” (1 Peter 1:17)—that is, reverential fear of God (never fear of man), as good citizens of our heavenly country. HMM

Thursday, September 8

The Righteous Judge

“That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25)

People often make erroneous judgments. Even those who are officially appointed or elected to judge others are sometimes mistaken, and so we have a whole system of appeals courts. Yet even the Supreme Court, composed as it is of fallible human beings, often seems to be wrong. But, as Abraham recognized long ago while interceding for the people in Sodom, we can be confident that the Judge of all the earth will do right!

He not only can judge our actions in relation to His revealed will, but can also discern thoughts and motives and, therefore, “judge the secrets of men” (Romans 2:16), and He will do so in absolute rightness. Furthermore, “he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). “The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: . . . and my judgment is just,” asserted the Lord Jesus (John 5:22, 30). To those who reject or ignore His redeeming love, relying instead on their own worth, “there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (Hebrews 10:26-27).

To those who have been redeemed through saving faith in Christ, there will, indeed, be a Judgment Day, but it will be for dispensing of rewards for faithful service rather than for salvation, and this also will be done righteously. “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day” (2 Timothy 4:8). HMM

Friday, September 9

God's Remnant

"It may be the LORD thy God will hear all the words of Rabshakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God; and will reprove the words which the LORD thy God hath heard: wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that are left." (2 Kings 19:4)

These words were part of King Hezekiah's plea to Isaiah for help in prayer against Rabshakeh and the Assyrian army besieging Jerusalem. It marks the second time in which this particular word is used for "the remnant," the first being in Genesis 45:7, when Joseph assured his brothers that God had sent him into Egypt to preserve for Israel "a posterity" in the earth. However, this word (Hebrew *sherith*) is prominent later in the writings of the prophets, who frequently refer to the faithful Israelite "remnant" during times of apostasy.

The same doctrine appears in the New Testament. Speaking of the children of Israel during the time of their dispersion among the nations because of their rejection of Christ, Paul says: "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Romans 11:5). There are many Jews even today who have received Jesus as their Messiah and personal Savior, even though Israel as a nation still rejects Him.

This biblical doctrine of the remnant applies especially to faithful Israelites who witness to God's truth even in times of national apostasy. Nevertheless, the principle seems also to apply to so-called Christian nations as well—such as the nations of Europe and America. Although nominally "Christian," each of these nations, like the church at Sardis, "hast a name that thou livest, and art dead" (Revelation 3:1), as far as true biblical Christianity is concerned. Nevertheless, in each, there is still a remnant of real believing Christians, and these have the great responsibility to maintain a true witness for Christ in just such a time as this. HMM

Saturday, September 10

Choose Life

“I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.”
(Deuteronomy 30:19)

Shortly before his death, Moses restated the law and the covenant between God and His people summed up in the greatest commandment: “Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deuteronomy 6:5).

Furthermore, Moses claimed that “this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven. . . . Neither is it beyond the sea” (Deuteronomy 30:11-13). Nothing about it was hard to understand. “But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it” (Deuteronomy 30:14).

Indeed, the evidence that God is Creator, Judge, Provider, and Redeemer is all around us. Our text informs us that “heaven and earth” are witnesses of God’s nature. We have more than enough information than we need in order to respond. In fact, these things “from the creation of the world are clearly seen” so that those who reject are “without excuse” (Romans 1:20). Indeed, to ignore the evidence of creation and the Flood, one must be “willingly . . . ignorant” (2 Peter 3:5). Rejection is foolishness.

“See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil” (Deuteronomy 30:15). The choice is between blessing (v. 16) and cursing (v. 19). All lines of reasoning point toward the God of the Bible as the one true God. “Therefore choose life,” as our text encourages us, “That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life” (v. 20). JDM

Sunday, September 11

Evil Men

“Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked; For there shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out.” (Proverbs 24:19-20)

Many of us remember the horror of September 11, 2001. The United States had not been attacked on its continental soil since the Civil War, and the whole country stood glued to their TV sets in stunned agony at the evil atrocity of the terrorists’ hostility.

Loud and often have been the vows of retribution since then, but “wars and rumours of wars” continue unabated (Mark 13:7). Nothing (according to the Scriptures) will stop the hatred of evil men against that which represents the name and lifestyle of the Lord Jesus (John 15:18), but the vengeance belongs to God alone (Hebrews 10:30).

The challenge for most of us is that we forget that the Enemy is not merely this or that terrorist group (there have been countless such groups over the millennia), but “the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). If we are constantly in turmoil over the latest iteration of evil displayed in living color every day on our evening news, our souls will never gain peace.

It is the “joy of the LORD” that brings us strength (Nehemiah 8:10). It is the delight of being “rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate” (1 Timothy 86:18) that allows us to sense something of the unilateral love of the Lord Jesus. Seeking “the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” first (Matthew 6:33) is what brings our heavenly Father’s steadfast supply of all that we may need (Philippians 4:19).

Perhaps when evil days creep into our lives or our memory, we would do well to focus our “affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:2). HMM III

Two Faithful Friends

“But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state.” (Philippians 2:19-20)

Paul cited Timothy and Epaphroditus as two faithful ministry friends (Philippians 2:19-30). Their activities provide a great inventory to follow as we “work out [our] own salvation” (Philippians 2:12).

- Likeminded: The Greek word is *isopsuchos*, or “equal in soul.” Effective ministry friendships agree in purpose (Amos 3:3).
- Genuine Care: The Holy Spirit used *merimnao*, a burden for others’ needs. Philippians 2:2-4 lists the restrictions.
- Seek Christ’s Things: Edify each other (1 Corinthians 14:12), focus on heavenly ideals (Colossians 3:1), and crave the kingdom and God’s righteousness more than our welfare (Matthew 6:33).
- Serve Together: Timothy was to Paul like a “son with the father” serving with him “in the gospel” (Philippians 2:22). To be acceptable, that service must be in “righteousness, and peace, and joy” (Romans 14:17).
- Companion in Labor: Similarly, Epaphroditus is said to work with Paul (Philippians 2:25). As with Timothy, their focus was “to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith” (1 Thessalonians 3:2).
- Fellow Soldier: Military metaphors abound in the Bible, with a common thread of the spiritual warfare defined in Ephesians 6:10-18. We must “endure hardness” when we assist in the ministry (2 Timothy 2:3).

Not every Christian meets the excellence of these faithful friends. “Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?” (Proverbs 20:6). HMM III

Tuesday, September 13

Rebels against the Light

“They are of those that rebel against the light; they know not the ways thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof.” (Job 24:13)

One of the most common objections to the Christian gospel is our insistence that belief in Christ is necessary for salvation. What about those who never hear of Christ—are they lost as well as those who willfully reject Him?

Because of this problem, a number of evangelicals are now saying that people in other religions can be saved if they live up to whatever light they have, whether in nature or conscience or religion. The problem is that they do not live up to the light they have. “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

There is, indeed, much light in the creation. In fact, Romans 1:20 says these evidences “from the creation of the world are clearly seen”—in fact, so clearly seen that men are “without excuse” when they reject this light. But reject it they have. They “changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things” (v. 23). In fact, “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23) and thus are lost without Christ.

But are there some who accept and follow whatever light they have, and will God save them? Consider Cornelius. He was “a devout man, and one that feared God” (Acts 10:2), and Peter was sent to him by God to tell him about Christ. “In every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him,” Peter said (v. 35). Cornelius was not actually saved, however, until he personally believed on Christ. The implication may be that God will send more light by some “Peter” to those few who do believe and obey what light they already have. Once they finally hear of Christ and His great salvation, they will gladly receive Him and be saved—but not before. HMM

Wednesday, September 14

Dogs and Dangers

“Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.” (Philippians 3:2)

Although our salvation is secure, Paul alerts us to the possibility that we can be spoiled (Colossians 2:8), our faith can be shipwrecked (1 Timothy 1:19), and we can fall from our own “steadfastness” (2 Peter 3:17). These are not idle threats. There are those who are the “enemies of the cross of Christ” (Philippians 3:18), hence these startling descriptions in today’s verse.

Dogs, both literally and metaphorically, are never mentioned in a positive context in Scripture. “Dogs” encircled the Lord Jesus while on the cross (Psalm 22:16). Blind watchmen are “dumb dogs” and ignorant shepherds are “greedy dogs,” since neither are seeking the good of God’s people (Isaiah 56:10-11). We are explicitly warned not to give “that which is holy unto the dogs” (Matthew 7:6). We must “beware of dogs” indeed.

Those motivated by evil come under severe condemnation. False prophets are called “wolves” (Matthew 7:15), false apostles are deceitful (2 Corinthians 11:13), and those who falsely profess Christ are abominable, disobedient, and reprobate (Titus 1:16).

The concision (mutilators) are those who demand the Old Testament circumcision as proof of conversion (Galatians 6:12-15), thus ignoring and nullifying the grace of God given through the Lord Jesus Christ.

All such workers of iniquity will be rejected by this same Lord Jesus when they insist that their works are sufficient for salvation (Matthew 7:22-23). HMM III

Thursday, September 15

The Riches of His Grace

“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” (Ephesians 1:7)

The attributes of God are characterized by the “riches of His grace.” This amazing grace led Him to shed His blood as the price of our redemption.

No wonder men have developed the familiar acrostic for GRACE—“God’s Riches at Christ’s Expense.” “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Paul seems again and again to try to find descriptions for these riches. To the Romans he wrote of “the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering” (Romans 2:4) and of His plan to “make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of [his] mercy” (Romans 9:23). Speaking of God’s mercy, he exclaims, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Romans 11:33).

The inexhaustibility of these infinite depths of grace and mercy led Paul to call these attributes “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8). Desiring that all believers might learn to appreciate the tremendous future they have in Christ, he prayed that “the eyes of your understanding being enlightened,” somehow we might come to appreciate even now “the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints” (Ephesians 1:18).

Yet, marvelously rich and full though His grace is now, there is much more to come. “God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, . . . That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4-5, 7). HMM

Friday, September 16

God Is Love

“And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” (1 John 4:16)

God is clearly “the Lord, the righteous judge” (2 Timothy 4:8), but He is also “the God of love and peace” (2 Corinthians 13:11). Not only in our text verse but also in another place, we are reminded that “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Of all the attributes of God, His nature of love is the most definitive. God is love!

It was not His omnipotence nor His omniscience that constrained Him to create men and women in His image. It must have been His nature of love, the desire for fellowship with beings like Himself. There is not much revealed on this question—only hints. “I have created him for my glory” (Isaiah 43:7). “The LORD hath made all things for himself” (Proverbs 16:4).

But fellowship is a two-way relationship and requires freedom to choose on the part of both. When man volitionally broke that fellowship, sin came into the world and God’s creation purpose was to all appearances set aside.

But God is love! He had not only a plan of creation but also a plan of salvation already in process. He “saved us, . . . according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Timothy 1:9).

And so “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us” (1 John 3:1). God is, indeed, a God of love! HMM

Saturday, September 17

The Foot of Pride

“Let not the foot of pride come against me, and let not the hand of the wicked remove me.” (Psalm 36:11)

The contrast in this psalm is not only between good and evil, but more specifically between the prideful man who lives without fear of God and the God in whom godly men trust.

The description of the evil man (vv. 1-4) is an apt description of a modern-day humanist. He is convinced that God, if He exists, does not intervene in the affairs of men. He therefore sets himself up as an authority, deciding right and wrong on his own arbitrary scale. He has “no fear of God” (v. 1), and arrogantly he “flattereth himself in his own eyes” (v. 2), speaking “iniquity and deceit” (v. 3). He is foolish, and even his humanitarian deeds are not good, in the ultimate sense. Furthermore, the modern-day humanist “abhorreth not evil” (v. 4), insisting that such sins as promiscuity, homosexuality, witchcraft, abortion, brainwashing of children in pantheistic evolution, etc., are, in reality, to be desired.

The contrast with God consists of a list of some of His majestic attributes in His dealing with men. “Thy mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep: O LORD, thou preservest man and beast. How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light” (vv. 5-9).

The wicked with his “foot of pride” will ultimately fall (vv. 11-12). But we can pray as David prayed, “O continue thy lovingkindness unto them that know thee; and thy righteousness to the upright in heart” (v. 10). JDM

Sunday, September 18

Our God Is Everywhere

“The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.” (Proverbs 15:35)

The God who created and made all things is not only omnipotent, He is omnipresent. “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him” (2 Chronicles 16:9).

David’s insightful 139th psalm is certainly one of the most striking affirmations of God’s omnipresence. “If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee” (Psalm 139:8-12).

God’s omnipresence, however, should not be understood in a pantheistic sense. Although He sees everyone and everything, that does not mean He is in everyone and everything. The creation did not create itself!

But since God is everywhere, He Himself cannot be seen anywhere. Jesus said concerning the Father, “Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape,” but He also said, “I am come in my Father’s name” (John 5:37, 43). “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9).

It is also a wonderful revelation that the Holy Spirit of God now indwells every Christian believer, so this is another way in which God is everywhere—that is, wherever there are true Christians, God is there. “Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:20). HMM

Monday, September 19

The Wickedness of Unbelief

“And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you.” (Deuteronomy 13:10-11)

In context, this “wickedness” was the crime of rejecting and influencing others to reject the Lord. While this is not a capital crime in a Christian context, this passage does show how God feels about the sin of unbelief—especially trying to persuade others into unbelief—in the infinite love and sacrifice of Christ who suffered and died for their sins. “He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” (Hebrews 10:28-29).

Unbelief in Christ is, in fact, the only sin which God cannot forgive, and thus is the most wicked sin of all. Christ died for all our sins, and thus will provide full forgiveness for all who will accept His gift of salvation. Christ Himself said: “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).

One of the final words of the Bible warns: “But the fearful, and unbelieving . . . shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8). The Lord Jesus is speaking of those who have spurned His sacrificial love. It may seem a light thing in our modern society to ignore or reject Him, but it will eventually prove “a fearful thing” (Hebrews 10:31) to face Him in judgment. HMM

Tuesday, September 20

Confidence in Christ Alone

“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.” (Philippians 3:7-8)

During the three verses prior to the text for today, Paul had listed some of the rather spectacular credits he had obtained “in the flesh” (Philippians 3:4). His family lineage and achievements were both professionally stellar and legally blameless. He had every right to be proud of himself.

Yet, in strong language, Paul values these personal achievements as the excrement of animals when he compares the gain of being given “the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Philippians 3:9). A vivid contrast indeed!

Jesus taught that if anyone would become His disciple, then he must “deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mark 8:34). Further, such a disciple must “lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s” (Mark 8:35). Owning the whole world was worthless if it meant that the price would cause one to “lose his own soul” (Mark 8:36). Hard bargains indeed!

Paul sought, as each of us should also, “the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus” (today’s verse). Invoking all of the triune Godhead, Paul begged for comprehension of the “love of Christ, which passeth knowledge,” so that he can be “filled with all the fulness of God” (Ephesians 3:18-19). Such knowledge brings “full assurance of understanding” (Colossians 2:2). That is a good return indeed!

“Wherefore beloved,” Peter said, “be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.” (2 Peter 3:14). HMM III

Wednesday, September 21

But God

“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” (Galatians 4:4-5)

God makes all the difference! There was a time when the whole world was in bondage to sin and death. But God!

“But . . . God sent forth his Son . . . To redeem them that were under the law.” Because He did, “the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8:21). But there was a problem, for every man was still a lost sinner, deserving to die under the righteous, well-deserved wrath of a Holy God. But God!

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). He died for us, suffering in our place, because He loved us. The issue is not yet settled, however, for how could a dead redeemer complete the work He was sent to do? But God!

“But God raised him from the dead” (Acts 13:30). The price for sin was for ever settled, so that God, in full righteousness and in mighty power, could raise His beloved Son, alive forevermore. Yes, but we ourselves are still sinful—still dying. Our very nature keeps us in bondage to sin, even though the price for our deliverance has been fully paid. But God!

“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love where-with he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ. . . . For by grace are ye saved through faith; . . . it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:4-5, 8). We cannot fully understand. But God does not require us to understand—only to believe, and receive. HMM

Thursday, September 22

Purified Seven Times

“The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.” (Psalm 12:6-7)

The preservation of the divinely given words of Scripture is incomparably superior to that of all other ancient writings. God has not allowed any of His words to “pass away,” for Jesus said: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matthew 24:35). They are, in fact, “for ever . . . settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89).

Although the original “autographs” of Moses, Paul, and the other human writers have long vanished (perhaps they have even been translated to heaven with the Ark of the Covenant—note Revelation 11:19), God saw to it that dedicated Hebrew scribes and Christian scholars meticulously copied the writings through the centuries so that we still have God’s Word to guide us today. Although there are variant readings in different manuscripts, the original words are there somewhere. Very few real questions remain about any of these, so we have the original Greek and Hebrew words to a high degree of accuracy.

The fires of anti-Christian persecution, caviling humanistic philosophies, literary criticism, scientific skepticism, pagan pantheism, cultic distortions, and apathetic indifference have sought to destroy God’s Word, but all have failed. It is the bestseller of all time, translated into more languages than any other writings.

No matter what forces are directed against it, it always emerges brighter and surer than ever! Even this present generation will fail in all modern attempts to defeat the Holy Scriptures, for God will “preserve them from this generation for ever.” HMM

Friday, September 23

The Meaning of Man

“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Psalm 8:3-4)

This question has been posed as a rhetorical question by many generations of skeptics, especially in our present generation when the tremendous size of the universe is often used to argue that God, if He exists, could not possibly be interested in such a small speck of dust as our own planet.

But, essentially, the same argument was used against Job by one of his three “miserable comforters” (Job 16:2) over 3,500 years ago. “How then can man be justified with God? . . . that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm?” (Job 25:4, 6). This dismal type of reasoning, however, is utterly fallacious. Significance is not a function of size, but of purposeful complexity, and the human brain is surely the most complex physical system in the entire universe, as acknowledged even by such an eminent atheistic scientist as Isaac Asimov. Rather than being insignificant nonentities, men and women have been created in the very image of God and are the objects of His redeeming love.

The most wonderful measure of man’s importance is the fact that God, Himself, became a man! “Christ Jesus . . . being in the form of God, . . . took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:5-7) to be able to take our death penalty upon Himself. Furthermore, God’s love for man is measured not only by His substitutionary death for our sins, but also by His eternal creative purpose for us. He has redeemed us so that “in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:7). HMM

Saturday, September 24

For Thy Name's Sake

“For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name’s sake lead me, and guide me.” (Psalm 31:3)

In this psalm of misery and mercy, we see David’s testimony. “In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness” (Psalm 31:1). His faith was strong, but afflictions and opposition were on all sides. He appeals to God for relief (Psalm 31:2) and is confident of the reply, and that that reply will reflect God’s omnipotence and grace. His total trust was in this benevolent God. “Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth” (v. 5), which, of course, was quoted by Christ at the moment of His death on the cross (Luke 23:46).

But note David’s grounds for appeal to God for action: “For thy name’s sake,” as recorded in our text. David’s heartfelt desire here is more than merely relief from his persecution, as desperate as was that need, but for the glory of God and the honor of His name.

God’s name and reputation are at stake when His children are being persecuted. Indeed, the national leaders of Israel had frequently prayed for God to act on the same grounds (for example, see Exodus 32:12). Even in the New Testament we are encouraged to pray in that name: “And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (John 14:13).

Even though we are always warranted in using this plea in our praying, we must do so in recognition of and submission to the fact that there are limitations. God will never contradict His nature or His Word, and in His sovereignty He knows better solutions to each problem than we can ask for. His greater plans must always take precedence. But when these prerequisites are recognized and accepted, the prayer in His name and for His glory is the one which prevails. JDM

Sunday, September 25

My Lord and My God

“And Thomas answered and said unto Him, My Lord and my God.” (John 20:28)

Thomas has been called “doubting Thomas” because of his initial reluctance to believe in the Lord’s resurrection, but neither the Lord nor the other disciples ever viewed him in such a light. His later ministry, as the first missionary/martyr to India, speaks clearly of his great faith.

It is only in John’s gospel that we have any specific insight into Thomas’ character. When the other disciples sought to dissuade Jesus from returning to Jerusalem, it was Thomas who urged, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16). Thomas understood the dangers awaiting them, but was ready to go wherever Jesus desired him to go. In the upper room when Jesus spoke of going away, Thomas, still willing to go with Him anywhere, was the only one to ask, “Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?” (John 14:5). Then, just a few hours later, the Lord had been crucified, and soon “the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews” (John 20:19) as they hid themselves in the upper room.

But Thomas was not hiding! The Scriptures do not say where he was when Jesus appeared in their midst, but he was not hiding there like the others. He may well have been out working or witnessing, doing whatever he could to follow the Lord, but he (like the others) had failed to understand Jesus’ promise that He would rise again.

When the other disciples reported that they had seen the resurrected Lord, Thomas, realizing the tremendous significance of such a miracle if it were true, insisted he must see the proof firsthand. Then, when he saw the Lord, he showed a higher comprehension of what had taken place than any of the others, as he whispered in awe: “My Lord, and my God!” HMM

The Glory of the Lord

“And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD.” (1 Kings 8:10-11)

This remarkable glory cloud filling Solomon’s Temple at its dedication had also been present when the tabernacle in the wilderness was dedicated. At that time, Moses recorded how “a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, . . . and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.” Furthermore, this “cloud of the LORD was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys” (Exodus 40:34-35, 38). There could be no doubt as to His presence.

It is well known that this cloud of divine glory was called the Shekinah. Although this actual word never occurs in the Bible itself, it is closely related to the Hebrew words for “dwell” (*shakan*) and “tabernacle” (*mishkan*).

The significant truth here, of course, is not the name, but the fact. The glory cloud was removed when Israel became apostate. “And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city” (Ezekiel 11:23).

When God returned to Earth in the person of His Son, “the Word was made flesh, and [tabernacled] among us.” Then, once again, those who had eyes to see “beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father” (John 1:14). By His Spirit, He now even lives in the human bodies of those who receive Him, and “Christ in you” becomes our own “hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). Then, as we live in His Word, “we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18). HMM

Tuesday, September 27

The New Creation

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.” (Galatians 6:15)

In the original Greek text of the New Testament, the word translated “creature” is the same as “creation,” so Paul, in our text, is stressing the vital importance of being a “new creation” in Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is nothing less than the mighty Creator of heaven and Earth (Colossians 1:16), and the very same creative power which called the universe into existence must be exerted on each lost sinner to create in him a new nature, capable of having the eternal fellowship with God for which man and woman were created in the beginning.

This new creation is not only for the purpose of saving their souls, but also for transforming their lives. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Although good works can never bring salvation, salvation must inevitably bring good works, for we are thereby “created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). Paul exhorts us to continually “put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24).

Adam and Eve were originally created “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:27), but that image has been grievously damaged by unbelief and overt sin. Although still resident in man—in fact, distinguishing him from the animals—this divine image must be renewed through saving faith in our Creator/Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Scripture reminds all true believers that they “have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Colossians 3:9-10). HMM

Wednesday, September 28

The Unintentional Prophet

*“And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation.”
(John 11:51)*

Even after seeing the miracle of Lazarus restored to life, high priest Caiaphas refused to believe Jesus was the Messiah and was more firmly resolved than ever to have Him put to death. He used the excuse that Jesus might cause the Romans to destroy the Jews religious system. So he said, “It is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not” (John 11:50).

Like Balaam, forced to prophesy what he did not intend (Numbers 24:10-13), Caiaphas was made to predict the true significance of Christ’s coming death. Instead of His death being “expedient for us”—for Caiaphas and his system—it was indeed “expedient that one man should die for the people” (John 18:14).

This is a remarkable divine irony. Caiaphas, the chief religious representative of God to the people of Israel, should have known the Old Testament prophecies and gladly welcomed Jesus as the promised Messiah. Instead, he organized His trial and condemnation. Yet he was divinely inspired (without knowing or intending it) to point out the real mission of Christ to the Jews and the whole world—that of substitutionary sacrifice for their sins. It is also interesting that in 1992 the bones of this same Caiaphas were discovered in a tomb underneath the modern city.

So far as we know, Caiaphas died still rejecting Christ. Nevertheless, following Christ’s substitutionary death, the evidence for His glorious resurrection (eternal, not temporary like that of Lazarus) became so clear and compelling that “a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). Caiaphas did, indeed, manage to get Jesus crucified, but the result was salvation for multitudes. HMM

Thursday, September 29

Knowing Christ

“That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.” (Philippians 3:10-11)

When Paul speaks of knowing the Lord Jesus, he stresses the process involved in reaching the desired level of knowledge. These particular points of awareness (knowing the resurrection power, the fellowship of sufferings, and being conformed to His death) are not mere academic achievements, but part of the process of experiencing life and personal study of God’s Word that produces confident knowledge.

John’s letter gives several key signs on how to “know” the Savior, one of which is keeping God’s commandments (1 John 2:3-5). The lifestyle of obedience (process of godliness) provides the experience that produces the knowledge.

Paul’s reference to the power of the resurrection is reflected in the wonderful promise of Ephesians 1:17-21. There, Paul says we can know the “exceeding greatness of his power” which was demonstrated in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus—that very power being beyond anything that can be observed in this or any age to come.

The fellowship that we now share in Christ’s sufferings is merely the process by which we are “being made conformable unto his death” (today’s verse). Paul noted that we were “crucified with Christ” but are still alive since Christ “liveth in [us]” (Galatians 2:20). Our bodies are to be “living [sacrifices]” so that we can prove the “good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God,” having been transformed by our renewed minds (Romans 12:1-2).

These many life processes are what our gracious God has decreed for our ultimate eternal possession—being “conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29). HMM III

Friday, September 30

The Prophet's Chamber

“And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber; I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither.” (2 Kings 4:9-10)

This sparsely furnished little room, built by a kindly woman and her elderly husband, was the prototype of all the so-called “prophet’s chambers” that have been built for traveling teachers and evangelists ever since.

Little did this simple couple anticipate what fruit their kindness would bear one day. “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers” the Bible says, “for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Hebrews 13:2). In the first place, to show his appreciation, Elisha prayed that the Lord would give them a son, and God miraculously answered (2 Kings 4:16-17).

Then, tragically, the boy died quite suddenly several years later while Elisha was at Mount Carmel, some 15 miles away. The Shunammite woman laid her son on Elisha’s bed in the prophet’s chamber, then rode hastily to find Elisha and bring him to the boy. The round trip must have taken her two days or more, and the boy’s dead body lay on the prophet’s bed in the little room all that time.

But then Elisha prayed once again, and the most amazing event took place there (2 Kings 4:33-35). For only the second time in history, a dead person was restored to life.

The Shunammite mother and her son are never heard from again. But for 3,000 years the testimony of a little chamber and the love and faith of the godly woman who prepared it as a simple service for her Lord and His prophet, and the godly mother who sacrificially loved her son, has been an inspiration and example to multitudes. HMM

Saturday, October 1

Unshakable Things

“And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.” (Hebrews 12:27)

In this present evil world, there are many pressures that would tend to shake our faith and tempt us to compromise. Paul would exhort persecuted believers “that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled” by such things, but rather to “stand fast” in the truths God has taught them (2 Thessalonians 2:2, 15).

The “hope set before us: . . . we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast” (Hebrews 6:18-19). The “word” to which our text refers is from Haggai 2:6-7: “For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come,” who will establish “a kingdom which cannot be moved” (Hebrews 12:28).

Note God’s amazing promise: “The heavens shall vanish away like smoke, . . . but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished” (Isaiah 51:6). Similarly, Jesus said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matthew 24:35). “The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:17).

The earth may crumble, and even our bodies may return to dust, but God’s Word endures, and so do His righteousness and His kingdom and His great salvation! If our hope is in Him and His Word alone, and if we are seeking to do His gracious will, then our faith and our destiny can never be shaken. “For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain” (Isaiah 66:22). HMM

Sunday, October 2

In His Steps

“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.” (Psalm 37:23)

There is nothing more satisfying to a believer than to be living in the will of God for his life. And it is good to know that God actually *delights* in leading us along that way which He is laying out for us. There are numerous Bible verses to this effect. One of the most familiar is “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:6).

That verse gives us a basic principle for knowing His way. We need to seek His leading in everything! Of course, it may not be an easy path. “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

Even if the path seems difficult at times, it is a good path, because it honors Him. “He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake” (Psalm 23:3). He is the good Shepherd, and if we lose the way for a time, He can bring us back. As the prophet said: “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:23).

An important check to be sure we are not drifting far off the path is to be sure we don’t disobey or question His written Word. “Order my steps in thy word,” we should pray each day (Psalm 119:133). Then He promises: “And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left” (Isaiah 30:21).

It may not be an audible voice, but we can hear. Jesus promised: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). Then we can say, as the ancient servant testified: “I being in the way, the LORD led me” (Genesis 24:27). HMM

Monday, October 3

Following the Mark

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:13-14)

Paul called his personal achievements (Philippians 3:4-6) as valuable as dung (v. 8), rejecting his own righteousness (v. 9). Now he is focused on reaching the “high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” He is well aware that he has not already attained God’s ultimate design for him, nor is he perfect in any sense of what he will become, but he intends to follow after and be “apprehended” of the Lord Jesus (Philippians 3:12).

To begin with, Paul knows that he must forget “those things which are behind.” Not only his rather stellar reputation and achievements, but especially the awful conditions of being “without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). Those terrible conditions were done away with when Paul (and those of us who are twice-born) were created after God “in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24).

Now, having been apprehended of Christ and forgetting those things that were part of our old lives, we can “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (today’s verse). Like for an athlete, the prize is gained only by those who win, not by those who run “uncertainly” (1 Corinthians 9:24, 26).

Thus, we cannot win if we have “two masters” (Luke 16:13), nor can we please “him who has chosen” us if we entangle ourselves with the affairs of this life (2 Timothy 2:4). May God keep us focused on the prize. HMM III

Tuesday, October 4

The Dispensation of Grace

“If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward.” (Ephesians 3:2)

So-called “dispensationalism” has had both its advocates and opponents among Bible-believing Christians. The Greek word translated “dispensation” (*oikonomia*), from which we derive our English word “economy,” actually means an “economy,” or also a “stewardship.”

The number and nature of the various “dispensations” or “economies” through which the Creator has dealt with His human creation during the course of history has been the subject of considerable discussion and variation among commentators. Possible distinct dispensations might include the post-Eden economy instituted after sin and God’s curse came into the world, the post-diluvian economy established by Noah after the Flood, and the economy begun by Abraham when God began to work especially with the nation of Israel. However, none of these are actually called “dispensations” in the Scriptures, so any such listing is bound to be somewhat arbitrary.

There are two dispensations, however, specifically called such in Scripture. One is the “dispensation of the fulness of times,” when God will “gather together in one all things in Christ” (Ephesians 1:10). This will be the eternal economy of the new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21-22).

Then there is this present “dispensation of the grace of God.” We, like Paul, have been called as “stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). So, like Paul, each of us could say that “a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me” (1 Corinthians 9:17), and that “I am made a minister [or ‘servant’], according to the dispensation of God which is given to me” (Colossians 1:25). Thus the dispensation of grace is a real stewardship responsibility committed to each believer. HMM

Wednesday, October 5

The Heart of Stone

“Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” (Ephesians 4:18)

The blindness mentioned in our text is the same word used to describe a kind of stone. In verb form, this word indicates a process and means “to make hard or to petrify.” Often the word is translated as “hardness.”

The people of Israel developed a hard heart and mind toward God and the things of God (2 Corinthians 3:13-15), which continually brought grief and anger to the Lord Jesus (Mark 3:5). Even the disciples suffered from this hardness (Mark 6:52; 8:17).

Our text is directed toward New Testament believers who are challenged not to become blinded or petrified as are unbelievers. This petrification in the moral realm can be compared to the loss of sensation in the physical realm—a kind of spiritual paralysis as when sensor and motor nerves no longer respond. “Who being past feeling have given themselves over to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness” (Ephesians 4:19).

Petrification of once-living tissue usually takes place over the course of many years, as each organic molecule decays and is removed, with the space it occupied refilled with stony material dissolved in groundwater percolating through the host material. Or, it may take place as material is injected into the living tissue, thus stopping all life processes. In just such a way, the hardening of the heart can take place slowly, but finally petrification is complete. Petrification of wood can be stopped by removing it from the decay-and-replacement process, but natural processes cannot return it to its former state. Praise God that we can “put on the new man” (v. 24) with a renewed (new) mind and spirit (v. 23), no longer hardened toward the things of God. JDM

Thursday, October 6

Hastening His Coming

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

These very familiar words of the Lord Jesus are commonly considered as a statement of His Great Commission, commanding us to go “into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Actually, however, it is not given here as a command, but rather as a declarative statement—indeed, a prophecy—saying that we shall witness for Him to the very ends of the earth.

Then, His disciples were promised that “this same Jesus” would return (Acts 1:11), with the promise clearly tied to the prophecy. Just a few weeks previously they had asked, “What shall be the sign of thy coming?” (Matthew 24:3). And Jesus had answered, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (v. 14). Mark recorded His answer very simply: “The gospel must first be published among all nations” (Mark 13:10).

Peter says that the Lord may seem to have delayed “the promise of his coming” because He “is longsuffering . . . not willing that any should perish,” urging us to “account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation” (2 Peter 3:4, 9, 15), suggesting that we should be “looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God” (2 Peter 3:12).

We can hardly draw any other conclusion from such passages than that if we want the Lord to return quickly, we can hasten His coming by fulfilling His command and His prophecy, doing whatever we can to publish His gospel among all nations. His coming has always been imminent, because this could well have been done—and can be done—at any time. But it evidently has not been done yet. HMM

Friday, October 7

Who and What to Esteem

“Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.” (Hebrews 11:26)

We hear much today about the importance of self-esteem, with the implication that lack of self-esteem is the cause of many of the personal problems and antisocial activities of so many young people (and others as well) these days.

But this is not the biblical perspective. The problem really is *too much* self-esteem. The biblical command is that we should “in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3). The man Moses was once a prince of Egypt, probably in line to become the pharaoh, but he chose Christ and the people of God instead, “esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt” (today’s text).

Paul the apostle could have become the greatest teacher and leader in the religious/political life of his own Jewish people, but he said: “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:7-8). In these verses, “count” is the same word in the original Greek language as “esteem.”

Similarly, the apostle James assures us that we should “count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations”—that is, trials that test your faith—“knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience” (James 1:2-3).

Therefore, if we would truly conform to the will of God for our lives, we should be esteeming others more than cultivating self-esteem in ourselves, esteem knowing and serving Christ more than all the riches and fame of the world, and esteem it a joyful privilege when we are enabled to grow more like Him through the trials and testings He permits us to share. HMM

Even as Christ

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” (Ephesians 5:25)

Much has been said in recent years regarding family roles and responsibilities. Suffice it to say that many either misapply or ignore what the Bible has to say. Perhaps the clearest passage on this subject is that surrounding our text (vv. 21-33). Here we see, in a setting of “submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (v. 21), that the primary role of the wife is that of submission to her husband’s headship (v. 22), and that of the husband is self-sacrificial love for his wife (v. 25). Here we have the only formula for a marriage fulfilling to both.

Family relationships were given special attention at the time of the universal curse on mankind (Genesis 3:16); thus the God-given family roles, while not impossible to achieve, run contrary to our natures. Obviously, we can’t succeed on our own.

The key to adhering to these principles is noting the example of Christ and His church. The wife is to submit to her husband’s headship (v. 22). “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing” (vv. 23-24). The church, the Bride of Christ, has no legitimate function except under the headship of Christ.

Likewise, we see that Christ gave Himself for the church that He might “sanctify and cleanse it . . . that he might present it to himself a glorious church . . . holy and without blemish” (vv. 26-27). Even now He nourishes and cherishes the church (v. 29). Wives are to submit, as though submitting unto the Lord (v. 22) in everything (v. 24), and husbands are to love as Christ loved us, for “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). JDM

Sunday, October 9

Absent from the Body

“We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 5:8)

This wonderful phrase of hope—“absent from the body, present with the Lord”—was the most appropriate inscription we could think of to place on the gravestone of our youngest son when he died many years ago. He was a solid Christian young man with a good Christian testimony, so we are indeed “confident” that he has been “present with the Lord” ever since sudden cancer temporarily conquered his body, leaving a beautiful wife and three young children behind.

Therefore, though we all miss him deeply, we “sorrow not, even as others which have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Sadly, however, there are many others who are “without Christ, . . . having no hope, and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). Although Christ has paid the full redemption price on the cross to have their sins forgiven and to give them eternal life, they spurn His love and so Jesus has to say, “And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40).

The times of judgment are coming, when they learn that “whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15). Right now, however, all who know Christ as their Lord and Savior can know, with Paul, that “to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

Furthermore, when Christ returns, “them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him” (1 Thessalonians 4:14). And then He will change our old body, whether in the grave or still living, “that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” and “we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:2). HMM

Monday, October 10

Diligent Search

“I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search.” (Psalm 77:6)

Christopher Columbus is recognized in this country for his bold search across the Atlantic, resulting in the major exploration and colonization of North America. As with many great men, variations abound of his character, but he is widely recognized as a Bible-quoting religious man.

Motivation seems to be the key behind the success of history’s “great” men. Some inner drive captivated the heart of those explorers, inventors, statesmen, generals, and leaders. And so it is with the prophets, priests, and kings of the Kingdom—they were driven by a “burning fire” in their “bones” (Jeremiah 20:9).

Solomon, granted wisdom by God, nonetheless gave his “heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 1:13). Excellence does not just happen!

Those Berean Christians who were cited as being more “noble” than the Thessalonians were recognized because they “received the word with all readiness of mind, *and* [emphasis added] searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). They listened (passive), but they also searched (active).

Spiritual maturity does not come by mere chronological survival! “Strong meat,” the Scripture notes, “belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14).

Careful attention to the instructions in the Word *and* careful observance to follow those instructions are the only formula for God’s blessing of prosperity and “good success” (Joshua 1:8). HMM III

Tuesday, October 11

Not Convenient

“Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.” (Ephesians 5:4)

It seems surprising that “foolish talking” and “jesting” would be condemned as things that should “not be once named among you” (v. 3). Yet here it is, and commentators usually assume that the foolish talking and jesting so condemned really only apply to filthy talking and filthy jesting. After all, the popularity of many Christian speakers today seems to be measured by the amount of jokes and witticisms they inject into their messages.

This is a sensitive subject, and each Christian should conscientiously decide for himself what God is saying here, through Paul. In any case, it seems significant that the only reference in the Bible to “jesting” is a warning against it. It is also significant that one can never find this element in the sermons of Christ or the letters of Paul or anywhere in the Bible. The Bible writers seem to have believed that sin and salvation were such sober, serious issues that there was nothing there to joke about. We read several times of Jesus weeping, but never of Him laughing. The Scriptures often refer to “rejoicing,” but never to “having fun.”

Furthermore, Jesus warned that “every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36), and Paul exhorted us to “let your speech be always with grace” (Colossians 4:6). Our text says that foolish talking and jesting are “not convenient” for a Christian. Other things “not convenient” include the list of 23 sins in Romans 1:28-31, beginning with “unrighteousness” and ending with “unmerciful.”

Whether or not we can justify certain “convenient” times for jesting, there is one thing we can know is always convenient—that is, “giving of thanks.” HMM

Wednesday, October 12

The Indwelling Trinity

“That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.”
(Ephesians 3:16-19)

This prayer of the apostle Paul applies to us as well as “to the saints which are at Ephesus” (Ephesians 1:1). Paul directs his prayer “unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (3:14), and he requests both that “Christ may dwell in your hearts” and also that the Holy Spirit would strengthen our “inner man.” We know elsewhere that Christ is at the right hand of the Father in heaven (Ephesians 1:20), so that the Holy Spirit is the person who actually indwells our bodies as believers. And yet, because God is a triune God, if the Holy Spirit indwells us, so also must “the Spirit of Christ,” or else “he is none of his” (Romans 8:9).

But the prayer doesn’t end with Christ dwelling in our hearts. He further prays that “ye might be filled with all the fulness of God,” and thus the Father is there too! When we accept Christ, we accept also the Father and the Holy Spirit, for the three are one, and God in all His tri-une fullness thenceforth lives in our bodies.

The Lord Jesus Himself had prayed essentially the same prayer. “I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; . . . and my Father will love [you], and we will . . . make our abode with [you]” (John 14:16-17, 23). What a priceless privilege and responsibility is ours as believers, that our triune God of creation and redemption and direction is with us always! HMM

Thursday, October 13

Meditation in the Morning

*“My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.”
(Psalm 5:3)*

Bible study, meditation on the Word, and prayer are necessities for a healthy Christian life and are good to practice at any time of the day or night, according to the constraints of time and responsibilities of each individual. Other things being equal, however, the best time of all is in the early morning. A believer who awakens each morning to the voice of the Lord in His Word will, in turn, be ready to speak words of blessing to others through the day (Isaiah 50:4). And as we, in turn, look up to Him each morning in prayer, He will hear and direct our steps through the day.

This was the example set by the Lord Jesus Himself: “And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed” (Mark 1:35). If even Jesus Christ needed such a quiet time early in the morning set aside to fellowship with His Father, we also would do well to follow.

Note the prayer of David: “Cause me to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee” (Psalm 143:8). We urgently need to know the way we should walk each day, for it is so easy to get turned aside into our own ways, and the obvious time to pray for guidance is at the very beginning of every day.

One should not make a legalistic ritual of prayer and Bible meditation, of course, for it should come from a heart of love whenever and wherever it can be done, whether morning or evening. However it may work for each person, may God help us to say with the psalmist: “O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day” (Psalm 119:97). HMM

Friday, October 14

Perfect Minded

“Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.” (Philippians 3:15-16)

Earlier, Paul had noted that he was not “already perfect” (Philippians 3:12), using a form of the Greek verb *teleioo*. In today’s verse, Paul uses the adjective form *teleios*. Although the root of the word is the same, this particular usage is significant.

In verse 12, the Holy Spirit inspires Paul to use the past perfect tense of *teleioo*, rendering the translation “not having been perfected” and thereby recognizing that the end product of God’s salvation has not yet been completed. The adjective form, *teleios*, denotes the sense of maturity, both in our text and the other 18 instances in the New Testament.

Those of the family of God who are “mature,” even if we might be “otherwise minded,” are to expect that our Lord Jesus will reveal “even this,” or the prize that we are to focus on in Philippians 3:14. The “one thing” of Philippians 3:13 is so important that we must “walk by the same rule” and “mind the same thing” (today’s verse).

The Greek word for “walk” is only used four other times in the New Testament, and it describes marching in a row and following a prescribed order. We are to “walk in the steps” that Abraham exemplified (Romans 4:12), just as we are to “also walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25).

Finally, we are exhorted to “mind” the same thing. Our thought processes are to be focused on that one thing that is most important—seeking the kingdom first. May these clear commands find their way into our hearts. HMM III

Saturday, October 15

Never Alone

“When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up.” (Psalm 27:10)

There may be more people alive today than ever before, but there are also more lonely people today than ever before—divorced spouses, homeless people, many elderly parents and, perhaps saddest of all, orphaned or abandoned children. These and many others are still alone, even in a crowded world.

No one, though, was ever so alone as the Lord Jesus on the cross. “Behold, the hour cometh,” He had said, “yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me” (John 16:32). Then, only a few hours later, as He hung on the cross, even His heavenly Father had to leave Him, and He cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). He died alone, bearing the burden of all the sin of all the world on His soul.

But because He suffered alone, no one else need ever be alone again. “Be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5). The apostle Paul, suffering alone in a Roman dungeon shortly before his execution, could still say: “Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me” (2 Timothy 4:17). John the beloved, old and imprisoned alone on the tiny isle of Patmos, nevertheless “was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day” (Revelation 1:10) and then saw the Lord in all His glory. So it has always been with those who know the Lord, for He is there, even when all others have forsaken them, and He understands. He has already been there ahead of us, “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16). HMM

This Generation

“Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.” (Matthew 24:34)

This exciting prediction by Christ climaxes His great prophetic discourse on the Mount of Olives. He had given His disciples the signs they had requested, then discussed the coming great tribulation and finally His glorious return in the clouds of heaven. And “all these things” were to be fulfilled before “this generation” would pass away.

And what generation would that be? Many commentators have taken it as the Jewish “race,” but that would be redundant, since many other passages had already promised that the nation of Israel would never pass away (Jeremiah 31:37-40; etc.). Furthermore, the Greek word for “generation” (*genea*) is never used elsewhere for any meaning but that of a particular age generation. A similar word *genos* sometimes means “stock” or “kind,” but never *genea*.

Thus, the generation which Christ was predicting probably meant the generation that would see the events He had prophesied. “When ye shall see all these things,” He said, “know that it is near, even at the doors” (Matthew 24:33). What are some of “these things”? World wars, accompanied and followed by “earthquakes in divers places,” as well as “famines, and pestilences” (v. 7), worldwide spread of the gospel witness (v. 14), many false Christs and false prophets (v. 24), widespread wickedness and spiritual indifference as in the days of Noah (vv. 37-39), and the budding of the fig tree, Israel (v. 32).

The word for “this” in verse 34 is the demonstrative adjective, so Christ seems to be referring to “that” generation which sees “these things begin to come to pass.” That generation will see all these things fulfilled! To that generation He says: “Lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28). HMM

Monday, October 17

Follow the Leader

“Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:...)” (Philippians 3:17-18)

Godly leaders are responsible for living exemplary lives so that those whom they teach will both follow and eventually become leaders of others. “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ,” Paul demanded of the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 11:1). “In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works,” he instructed Titus (Titus 2:7). But Paul was *first* a follower of the life example of Christ.

Today’s verse uses some unusual terms to both define the responsibility to follow and mark those walking after Paul’s lifestyle. *Memos* is Greek for “follow,” compounded with a prefix that means “together.” Our English word “mimic” comes from *memos*. We are expected to imitate the examples of those who lead godly lives, who themselves are committed to emulate the Lord Jesus.

Further, we are expected to “mark” those living after godly examples. The Greek word *skopeo* is the strongest word among several for identifying someone or something. It has the sense of intense observation. In the secular literature, it is sometimes used for a spy. God expects us to pay careful attention to those who “have the rule over [us]” (Hebrews 13:17).

And we are to watch out for those who may influence us for evil. There are “enemies” of the Lord Jesus. Those are sometimes among us, and we must “mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Romans 16:17). May God give us the discernment to know the difference between “good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14). HMM III.

Tuesday, October 18

God the Owner

“The earth is the LORD’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.” (Psalm 24:1)

In communist countries, “the people” own the lands, while in capitalist countries, individuals may own “private property.” Both are myths unless these are viewed as a stewardship from God. We don’t really own anything, “for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out” (1 Timothy 6:7).

In the mineral kingdom, the most important substances are the precious metals upon which monetary standards are based, yet God makes it clear that all “the silver is mine, and the gold is mine” (Haggai 2:8). The greatest members of the plant kingdom are the mighty trees of the forest, and God reminds us that “the trees of the LORD are full of sap; the cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted” (Psalm 104:16). All the birds and beasts in the animal kingdom are His also. “For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills” (Psalm 50:10).

Again and again God reminds us that “all the earth is mine” (Exodus 19:5) and even the infinite heavens belong to Him. “Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD’s thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is” (Deuteronomy 10:14).

God has, indeed, given man “dominion . . . over all the earth” (Genesis 1:26), and Satan has, indeed, laid false claim to “all the kingdoms of the world” (Luke 4:5-6), but the fact remains that “the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will” (Daniel 4:32).

Most of all, every Christian should understand that he and all he has belong to God, by both creation and blood-bought redemption. “Ye are not your own. . . . For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). HMM

Wednesday, October 19

The Fatherhood of God

“For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.” (Acts 17:28)

“The fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man” was a religious cliché promoted for many years, especially by religious liberals in the period between the two world wars. However, continuing hostilities between and inside most nations now make the idea of universal brotherhood in this present world almost farcical.

The fact is, however, that God truly is the Father of all men, in the sense that He created them all. “Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us?” (Malachi 2:10). That was the rhetorical question posed to Israel in the last book of the Old Testament. In the New Testament the apostle Paul confirmed the same great truth to the pagan Gentiles. “[God] hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth,” and “we are the offspring of God” (Acts 17:26, 29).

The sad fact is, however, that most men and women have actually become “children of the wicked one” (Matthew 13:38) because of sin. We can only become spiritual children of the heavenly Father by being born again through faith in Christ. But we then truly “become the sons of God,” as assured to all those who “believe on his name” (John 1:12).

Now we believers can all rejoice in the wonderful truth that we have the same heavenly Father. We have been “renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, . . . but Christ is all, and in all” (Colossians 3:10-11).

May God help those of us who are (or will someday become) fathers on Earth to truly be children of our Father in heaven and thereby be genuine models of the heavenly Father to our human children here on Earth. HMM

Thursday, October 20

To the Animals

“Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.”
(Proverbs 6:6-8)

Adam and Eve originally were given dominion over all the animal creation (Genesis 1:26), but sin came in and things changed. Then, after the Flood, God placed the fear and dread of man “upon all that moveth upon the earth” (Genesis 9:2), and the primeval fellowship between man and his animal friends was broken.

More seriously, their fellowship with God was broken, and soon, in their autonomy, the source of true wisdom was largely forgotten. “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things” (Romans 1:22-23).

Ironically, God now directs such foolish people to the animals they worship to find the wisdom they should have learned from God. “Go to the ant,” says the Lord, to learn industry and prudence. “There be four things which are little upon the earth,” the Word says, “but they are exceeding wise: The ants . . . ; The conies . . . ; The locusts . . . ; The spider” (Proverbs 30:24-28). “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider” (Isaiah 1:3).

“But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee” (Job 12:7-8).

If nothing else, the intricate design of even the lowest animal is eloquent testimony to the wisdom of its Creator and the madness of those who deny Him. HMM

Friday, October 21

Heaven's Commonwealth

“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 3:20)

The translators of the King James Bible used the English word “conversation” in 18 passages, among which are five different Greek terms. Most of the words would be understood by our modern idea “manner of life” or behavior. However, in today’s verse, the word is *politeuoma*, derived from another Greek word, *polites*. Our English word “politics” comes from that, especially in the sense of citizenship as it relates to governmental oversight.

The apostle Paul is the only New Testament writer to use the “politics” word, and he does so only two other times. On one occasion, “all Jerusalem was in an uproar” (Acts 21:31) over Paul’s supposed violation of the Temple. After giving testimony of his conversion and subsequent ministry to the unruly crowd, Paul said, “Men and brethren, I have lived [*politeuomai*] in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1), simply and boldly declaring that he now lived as a citizen of heaven.

Earlier in his epistle to the Philippian church, Paul had challenged them, “Let your conversation [*politeuoma*] be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27). Paul’s challenge is just as clear to us: Live and think like our citizenship is in heaven.

Heaven’s rule may be best understood by our English word “commonwealth,” a political community founded for the common good. We are “joint-heirs” with Christ (Romans 8:17), and we should look “for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). HMM III

Saturday, October 22

The Pleasure of the Lord

“Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.” (Isaiah 53:10)

The very concept of God having pleasure in things that take place on Earth staggers the imagination. Most amazing of all is the revelation that it pleased Him to put His own Son through a terrible, bruising death, as the tremendous Messianic prophecy of our text reveals.

Nevertheless, this was the only possible way whereby “the pleasure of the LORD” could be accomplished in the redeemed lives of lost men and women, whom He had created for eternal fellowship with the triune God. “For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation” (Psalm 149:4).

Five times we read in the New Testament that God the Father spoke from heaven assuring us that He was “well pleased” with His “beloved Son” (Matthew 3:17; 17:5; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22; 2 Peter 1:17). “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him!” This is almost impossible to understand, but had it not been so, none of us ever could have been saved. The Lord Jesus Himself has confirmed to His own “little flock” that “it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

Thus, not only have we been created “for thy pleasure” (Revelation 4:11), but also we have been “predestinated . . . unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Ephesians 1:5). This is far beyond our comprehension, so we merely rest in the great truth that “it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). We know that “the LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him” (Psalm 147:11), and we rejoice with thanksgiving! HMM

Sunday, October 23

Fellowship

“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”
(Acts 2:42)

Much goes on in Christian churches today under the name of “fellowship.” Usually this consists of coffee and donuts, or church socials, or sports. As delightful as these functions may be, they should not be confused with biblical fellowship.

Nowhere in the New Testament do any of the Greek words translated “fellowship” imply fun times. Rather, they talk of, for example, “the fellowship of the ministering to the saints” (2 Corinthians 8:4) as sacrificial service and financial aid. (See, for example, 1 Timothy 6:18.)

Elsewhere, Paul was thankful for the Philippian believers’ “fellowship in the gospel” (Philippians 1:5), for he knew that “inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers [same word as fellowship] of my grace” (Philippians 1:7). This sort of fellowship may even bring persecution.

We are to emulate Christ’s humility and self-sacrificial love (Philippians 2:5-8) through the “fellowship of the Spirit” (Philippians 2:1). In some way known only partially to us, we have the privilege of knowing “the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Philippians 3:10), and even “the communion [i.e., fellowship] of the blood” and “body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:16).

As we can see, this “fellowship” is serious business. As in our text and subsequent verses, fellowship should be accompanied by teaching, prayer, and ministry to the poor (Acts 2:45).

This kind of fellowship will be in “favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47). JDM

Monday, October 24

Our Glorious Bodies

“We look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.” (Philippians 3:20-21)

Two vivid contrasts are highlighted in this text: We now have a vile body that will be changed into a glorious body. Our Lord Jesus will fashion us after the pattern of His own body.

There is ample evidence, both in Scripture and in our own experience, that our present physical bodies are “vile.” The English word seems more intense than the Greek, which simply means “lowly” or “humble.” Christ humbled himself when he took on our flesh (Philippians 2:8). The Virgin Mary saw herself in a “low estate” as she compared herself to the wonder of what was happening to her (Luke 1:48).

But one glorious day, the Lord Jesus will change our humble bodies into that which is reflective of His own. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). What a marvelous thought! Even “after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:26).

The exciting description of those absolute changes are encapsulated in 1 Corinthians 15:42-58. We have a mortal body now, but then it will be imperishable. There is no honor to our bodies now, but then they will be glorious. Weakness is our burden now, but in eternity we will be endued with power. Thank You, Heavenly Father, for this majestic promise. HMM III

Tuesday, October 25

Bringing Up Children

“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”
(Ephesians 6:4)

This verse, together with the parallel passage in Colossians 3:21, is probably the key New Testament instruction specifically dealing with the training of children. “Nurture” is from the same Greek word that is translated “chastening” in Hebrews 12:5, 7, and “instruction” in 2 Timothy 3:16. It has particular reference to carrying out child training with both firmness and gentleness, as needed and appropriate in each particular case.

The term “admonition” is from a Greek word meaning “putting in mind.” Thus, the “admonition of the Lord” implies teaching the ways of the Lord by using the Word of the Lord. There is no substitute for implanting a knowledge of God’s Word in the minds of our children. Even if they should drift away for a while in later life, the Lord can use His Word in their hearts to bring them back.

Both types of training—through action and through verbal teaching—are said in this passage to be primarily the responsibility of the father. The first reference in the Bible to training children deals with Abraham’s responsibility to bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (see Genesis 18:19). Mothers, of course, also have much responsibility and ability in this ministry (see Proverbs 1:8, and the example cited by Paul himself of how Timothy’s mother and grandmother had taught him—2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15). Fathers, too, sometimes delegate certain teaching responsibilities to tutors (Galatians 4:1-2), but the overall responsibilities are theirs.

And all of this training should be done in love. “Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged” (Colossians 3:21). Then we trust the Lord and pray. HMM

Wednesday, October 26

When Christ Ascended

“Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?)” (Ephesians 4:8-9)

This verse has been controversial but is nonetheless very important. The context is taken from Psalm 68:17-20: “The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: . . . Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: . . . our God is the God of salvation; and unto GOD the Lord belong the issues from death.”

The psalmist is apparently describing the Lord among His heavenly hosts, riding home as a mighty king returning with the spoils of battle. Evidently this battle prize consisted of His own people who had been held captive in an alien land but who now had been captured from the enemy by the returning King. To do this, the King (none other than the Lord Jesus Himself) “ascended up on high,” leading them to His own throne in the heavens.

But first He had to descend to the earth, and then even to “the lower parts of the earth.” This unusual phrase must refer to the great pit in the center of the earth confining the souls of the dead—the place called Hades.

One of Christ’s purposes on Earth was “to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Isaiah 61:1). That is exactly what He did when He died on the cross for the sins of these very captives, then, in the Spirit, descended into Hades to set them free.

He returned with the very “keys of hell and of death” (Revelation 1:18), alive forevermore. The souls of those who had died in faith came with Him, finally ascending with Him into “paradise,” in “the third heaven” (note Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 12:2, 4) to wait with Him for His future return to reclaim the whole earth. HMM

Thursday, October 27

Unceasing Prayer

“Pray without ceasing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

This is, no doubt, the shortest commandment in the Bible, and seemingly the most difficult to obey. How could anyone possibly pray without ceasing? What about sleeping, or working, or other necessary pursuits?

Paul himself claimed to pray without ceasing. For example, he wrote to the Roman church: “For God is my witness, . . . that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers” (Romans 1:9). To the Thessalonians he wrote: “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith” (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3). In his very last epistle he wrote: “I thank God . . . that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day” (2 Timothy 1:3).

It is obvious from such references that Paul did not mean we should be uttering prayers continually, but rather to be continually in a prayerful attitude and never to stop the regular practice of prayer. In like fashion, the Lord Jesus said: “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1). In the parable following this command, He spoke of God’s “own elect, which cry day and night unto him” (Luke 18:7). This would further imply that our prayerful attitude and regular practice of specific prayer should be taking place every day and every night. We should never “faint”—that is, “lose heart”—if the answer isn’t what or when we hope, but keep on praying anyway. When it’s the right time, He will, indeed, answer “speedily,” and in the right way (Luke 18:8).

To pray without ceasing means simply to be free to communicate quickly with Him, night and day, always in an attitude of prayer. “If ye abide in me,” He said, “and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7). HMM

Friday, October 28

One Day as a Thousand Years

“Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” (2 Peter 3:8)

It is sad that many Christians today are so eager to appear intellectual, they are willing to compromise God’s clear revelation to do so. God has made it as clear as plain words could make it, that “in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is” (Exodus 20:11). Yet because evolutionary “science” has alleged that the earth is billions of years old, multitudes of evangelicals have fallen in line, rejecting God’s plain statement of fact and then trying to find some interpretive loophole to hide behind.

Our text verse is perhaps the key verse of the so-called “progressive creationists” who try to correlate the days of creation in Genesis with the supposed 4.6 billion-year system of evolutionary geological ages, by citing Peter as agreeing that “one day is a thousand years.”

No, Peter is saying that “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years”! That is, God can do in one day what might, by natural processes, take a thousand years. In context, the apostle is condemning the last-day uniformitarians (those who teach that “all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation”) as “willingly ignorant” of the tremendous significance of the historical facts of creation and the Flood (2 Peter 3:3-6). Real written records only go back a few thousand years, and to attempt to calculate any date before that requires use of a premise which, in context, the Scriptures have just condemned! God says the uniformitarians are willingly ignorant and then urges those who believe His Word to “be not ignorant.” The only way we can know the date and duration of creation is for God to tell us, and He says He made all of heaven and Earth in six days, and not so long ago! HMM

Saturday, October 29

Compound Names of Jehovah

“In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” (Jeremiah 23:6)

There are seven compound names of Jehovah in Scripture which together provide profound insight into the person and work of our Lord. The first of these identifies Jehovah, the God of the Covenant, with the Creator “the LORD God [’Jehovahehlohim’] [who] made the earth and the heavens” (Genesis 2:4).

On finding a ram to sacrifice in place of his son, Isaac, “Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh [the Lord will provide]” (Genesis 22:14).

Contingent upon their keeping the law, God promised the people of Israel that “I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee [literally, ‘Jehovah-rapha’]” (Exodus 15:26).

Fresh from a miraculous victory in the first battle of the people of Israel, “Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovahnissi [Jehovah the Victor]” (Exodus 17:15).

Once the Lord had commissioned Gideon to lead the people of Israel out of bondage, “Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it Jehovahshalom [Jehovah sends peace]” (Judges 6:24).

In a passage concerning the future regathering and conversion of Israel quoted in our text, we see that Israel refers to the “Lord our righteousness [’Jehovah-tsidkenu’].”

Finally, in the last verse of his book, Ezekiel describes the absorbing charm of the heavenly city and the One who will preside over it, claiming, “The name of the city from that day shall be, The LORD is there [’Jehovah-shama,’ Jehovah the indweller]” (Ezekiel 48:35).

And best of all, He is all seven to us. JDM

Sunday, October 30

The Joyful Sound

“Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance.” (Psalm 89:15)

Many have been the Christians who have joined in singing “We have heard the joyful sound: Jesus saves; Jesus saves!” Not all have known, however, that this beautiful phrase comes from a great psalm extolling God’s marvelous works of creation and then His promises of redemption.

“The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them. The north and the south thou hast created them” (Psalm 89:11-12). Earlier verses note that “the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O LORD” (v. 5), speaking of the angels, “the sons of the mighty” (v. 6), literally, “the sons of God.” It is exciting to realize that the very first “joyful sound” was heard when God “laid the foundations of the earth.” Then it was that “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:4, 7).

There was also a joyful sound when Christ was born, and the angel came bringing “good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born . . . a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. . . . And suddenly there was . . . the heavenly host praising God” (Luke 2:10-11, 13).

Whenever a soul is saved, there is another joyful sound: “Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth,” said Jesus (Luke 15:7). Finally, there will be a most wonderful sound of joy on Earth when the Lord comes again. “And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isaiah 35:10). Therefore, even now, “my soul shall be joyful in the LORD: it shall rejoice in his salvation” (Psalm 35:9). HMM

Monday, October 31

Children of the Day

“Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.” (1 Thessalonians 5:5)

It may be significant that most of the days during the year which have been considered to have some special meaning are observed as “Days”—for example Independence Day, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving Day, etc. Those observed mainly at night—such as Halloween and New Year’s Eve, tend to emphasize frivolity or even sinfulness. Christmas Eve may be an exception, but this celebration (December 25) rarely notes the real reason for Christ’s incarnation.

It is for good reason that darkness has become a term referring not only to absence of daylight but also to absence of moral light. Many Biblical references make this connection. Note just a sampling.

“The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light” (Romans 13:12).

“For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love” (1 Thessalonians 5:7-8).

“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. . . . But all things that are reprovèd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light” (Ephesians 5:11, 13).

All who have trusted in Christ have been “delivered” by our heavenly Father “from the power of darkness” (Colossians 1:13). It would be utterly irresponsible, therefore, for us ever to shame our Father by behaving like the children of darkness. “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8). HMM

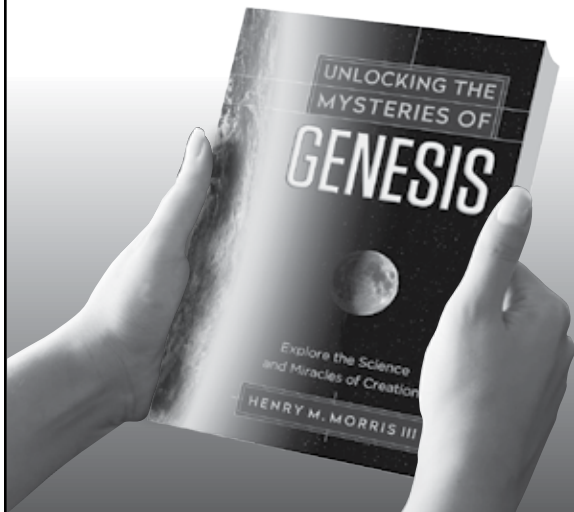
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Tuesday, November 1

Biblical Accuracy

“If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?” (John 3:12)

Many who profess to be Christian intellectuals today are arguing that we should defer to the evolutionists in matters of science and history, since the real message of the Bible is spiritual. The Genesis account, for example, is not meant to give us details of the events of creation, for scientists can give us this information. It merely assures us that God is somehow behind it all. But if this were all that God meant to tell us, its very first verse is enough for that! What is the need to describe all the days and acts of creation at all if the record has no real relevance to history or science?

As the Lord Jesus told Nicodemus in our text verse, if we cannot trust God’s Word when it relates “earthly things,” how can we possibly rely on its testimony of “heavenly things”? To some extent we can check for ourselves whether or not it is accurate when it records facts of history and processes of nature, but we have no means at all of determining whether it speaks the truth when it deals with heaven and hell, with salvation and eternal life, or with God’s purpose for the world in the ages to come.

The fact is that the Bible is accurate in all matters with which it deals, scientific and historical as well as spiritual and theological. It is a dangerous thing to listen to these modern “pied pipers” of evangelicalism whose self-serving compromises with evolutionary scientism have already led multitudes of young people astray in our Christian colleges and seminaries.

We yet may not have all the answers to alleged problems in the Bible, but we can be absolutely sure of God’s Word. When the answers are found, they will merely confirm what He has said all along. He is able and willing to speak the truth, and He means what He says! HMM

Wednesday, November 2

The Counting God

“Doth not he see my ways, and count all my steps?” (Job 31:4)

God is surely the Great Mathematician. All the intricacies of structure and process of His mighty cosmos are, at least in principle, capable of being described mathematically, and the goal of science is to do just that. This precise intelligibility of the universe clearly points to a marvelous intelligence as its Creator.

God even “tellethe the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names” (Psalm 147:4). Astronomers estimate that at least 10 trillion trillion stars exist in the heavens, and God has counted and identified each one! And that is not all: “The very hairs of your head are all numbered,” Jesus said (Matthew 10:30). From the most massive star to the tiniest hair, God has counted each component of His creation.

Such countings are far beyond human capabilities, for “the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured” (Jeremiah 33:22). But God has also created “an innumerable company of angels” (Hebrews 12:22) and has promised that the redeemed will include “a great multitude, which no man could number” (Revelation 7:9).

No wonder David exclaimed, “Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered” (Psalm 40:5).

Perhaps the most wonderful of all God’s counting activities is that implied in Job’s rhetorical question: “Doth not he see my ways, and count all my steps?” If He has numbered the hairs on our heads, we can be certain He numbers our steps along the way, and guides them all. “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way” (Psalm 37:23). HMM

Thursday, November 3

Creation and the Finger of God

“It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed. And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.” (Exodus 31:17-18)

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16), but this portion of Scripture was given by direct inscription of God! Moses testified: “The LORD delivered unto me two tables of stone written with the finger of God; and on them was written according to all the words, which the LORD spake with you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly” (Deuteronomy 9:10). “He wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments” (Exodus 34:28). Thus, out of all the Holy Scriptures, God chose to write this section, not through one of His prophets, but with His own finger! It should, therefore, be taken literally and most seriously.

It is also significant that these commandments were structured around a weekly day of rest, “remembering” God’s creation week—six days of creating and making everything in heaven and Earth, followed by a sanctified day of rest and refreshment (note also Exodus 20:8-11 and Genesis 1:31–2:3). Ever since the creation, people have observed a weekly calendar. The seven-day week (unlike the day, month, and year) has no astronomical basis. People keep time in weeks simply because God did! Even those who deny the six-day week of creation must observe it, for their biological rhythms are constructed that way by God. “The sabbath was made for man,” said Jesus (Mark 2:27). Since God considered the truth of the literal creation week so important that He inscribed it Himself, we should believe this portion of His Word first of all. HMM

Stand Fast

“Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.”
(Philippians 4:1)

Several adjectives precede the command contained in this text. Not only does Paul twice use “dearly beloved” to describe his relationship with the Philippians, but he also insists that he longs for them and anticipates joy at the recognition of the “crown” he will receive in heaven.

These are intense words. *Agapetos* is the descriptive Greek term translated “dearly beloved.” The Heavenly Father uses *agapetos* to express His love for His “beloved Son” (Matthew 3:17). Most of the New Testament letters freely use *agapetos* to describe various personal relationships with their brothers and sisters in Christ. That unique and deeply spiritual love is what demonstrates our difference to the unsaved (John 13:34-35).

Since Paul is separated from the Philippian church (probably writing the letter from Rome), his love for them caused him to “long after [them] all in the bowels of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:8). That passionate ache is mitigated by the joy coming from the certain knowledge that his work will result in a “victor’s crown” (Greek *stephanos*, today’s verse) when God rewards our service. “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?” (1 Thessalonians 2:19).

So, “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27). “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13). Stand fast in the liberty that salvation provides. Don’t become tangled up in the bondage of legalistic burdens (Galatians 5:1). “For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 3:8). HMM III

Saturday, November 5

Greetings

“Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness.” (Titus 1:1)

In New Testament times it was common to begin one’s letter to a friend with a salutation such as this, which usually identified the writer and the reader and then gave personal greetings.

Contrary to his normal practice, Paul spends the first three verses of this four-verse greeting speaking about himself, but he places the emphasis not on his own authority, but on the nature of the message which he has been given.

First, in designating his position as writer, Paul refers to himself as a “servant” (literally, “slave”) of God. His will had been voluntarily surrendered to do his Master’s will. Next, he identifies himself as “an apostle of Jesus Christ,” commissioned by Him to represent Him and His revelation. He then defines his apostleship as being in agreement with the message to which the elect have responded, and the “acknowledging [literally, ‘advanced knowledge’] of the truth which is after godliness.”

Next, Paul claims that his message is not a new doctrine, but has its past, present, and future aspects. It was “promised before the world began” (v. 2) by God, who has in the present been proclaiming “his word through preaching” (v. 3). Furthermore, his apostolic calling is “in [literally, ‘resting on’] hope of eternal life” (v. 2).

Paul then claims the message as his own, “committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Savior” (v. 3).

In a very real sense, this same message is now committed to us. Our knowledge of the truth and need for faith are at least as great; our call to submission and godliness equally serious. May God grant us the same level of commitment to the gospel and its propagation as that of Paul. JDM

Sunday, November 6

Jesus and the Fact of Hell

“Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” (Matthew 25:41)

How can it be that Jesus Christ, who taught so strongly the importance of love and forgiveness, could speak such words as these? Actually, Jesus had more to say about hell and eternal punishment than any other speaker or writer in the Bible. Since He is the Creator (Colossians 1:16), the coming Judge (John 5:22), and the only man who has died and risen permanently from the dead (2 Corinthians 5:14-15), we would do well to believe and heed His warnings. He knows whereof He speaks!

Listen to these prophecies, for example: “So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:49-50). “If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:47-48). There are other such warnings from Christ, but how can we reconcile such threats of everlasting doom with His own nature of love?

The fact is, however, that hell was prepared for the devil and his angels, not for people. The devil has been a rebel against God since the beginning, wanting to be his own god. When people follow the devil in this same rebellious path, rejecting God’s Word, they are showing they would be more comfortable with Satan than with Christ in eternity. Therefore Christ, because of His great love, has repeatedly warned them of what is coming, and so should we. “Of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire” (Jude 22-23). HMM

Monday, November 7

God Does Not Author Evil

“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.” (James 1:13-14)

One of the often-used excuses for rejecting the God of the Bible is *if* God is omnipotent (as the Bible teaches), and *since* evil exists in the world (as everyone can see), *then* God must be the author of evil or incapable of preventing it. Either way, such reasoning insists, that kind of God is not worthy of worship.

If that logic were accurate, then most of the foundational truths of Scripture should be rejected. The Bible insists that the whole of reality was initially “very good” (Genesis 1:31) but was quickly marred by Lucifer’s lie and Adam’s rebellion (Genesis 3:14-17). The thrice-holy God (Isaiah 6:3) has no pleasure in wickedness (Psalm 5:4), does not tempt any man with evil (James 1:13), and loves righteousness and hates wickedness (Psalm 45:7).

God does not cause evil. The Archenemy, Satan, is the father of untruth (John 8:44) and was the source of the deception of Eve (2 Corinthians 11:3) and the rebellion of Adam that brought sin and death into the creation (Romans 5:12).

The most precise description of the all-consuming character of the Creator God is that “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). There can be no impurity or inconsistency within the nature of the Godhead. The holy separateness of the Creator is such that no thing, no concept, no act, no thought can ever cause a break within the absolute light of our eternal God. HMM III

Tuesday, November 8

Should a Christian Get Angry?

“But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment” (Matthew 5:22)

There are a number of Scriptures that, taken alone, would indicate that a Christian should never get angry about anything. For example, note Ephesians 4:31: “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger . . . be put away from you.”

Yet, Jesus indicated only that anger “without a cause” was wrong and invited judgment. Many modern translations omit the phrase “without a cause” in this verse, but the phrase does occur in over 99.5 percent of all the Greek manuscripts and thus clearly should be retained.

If anger were never permitted for a believer, it would contradict even the occasional example of Jesus Himself. “And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts” (Mark 3:5). He was angered here by certain hypocrites among the Pharisees who were ready to condemn Him for healing a disabled man on the Sabbath.

We are never justified in getting angry over some personal injury or insult to ourselves. This is implied in context in such verses as cited above (Colossians 3:8, etc.). “Recompense to no man evil for evil . . . avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath” (Romans 12:17, 19). But if we do get angry in spite of ourselves, we are commanded, “Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (Ephesians 4:26).

There may be some situations involving injury or insult to the name or work of Christ where anger is indeed “with cause.” Even then, however, God would warn us to be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (James 1:19), remembering that “vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19). HMM

Wednesday, November 9

How Can a Man Be Just before God?

“Then Job answered and said, I know it is so of a truth: but how should man be just with God?” (Job 9:1-2)

Job was the most “just” (i.e., “righteous”) man of his age, according to the testimony of God Himself (Job 1:8; 2:3), yet his friends insisted his terrible suffering had been sent by God because of his sins. He knew he was innocent of the sins of which they were accusing him, and he knew he had earnestly tried to be obedient and faithful to God. Yet, he also knew that he, like all men, had come far short of God’s holiness (Romans 3:23). “I have sinned,” he confessed, “what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men?” (Job 7:20). “Cause me to understand wherein I have erred” (Job 6:24). And then comes the plaintive plea in our text: “How should a man be just with God?”

There is, indeed, no way by which a man can make himself righteous before God, for he is even born with a sin nature, inherited from father Adam. “If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse” (Job 9:20). Yet God created man for His own glory (Isaiah 43:7) and wants “all men to be saved” (1 Timothy 2:4). The great enigma is, how can God justify unrighteousness in men and still be righteous Himself.

The answer, of course, is that God, in Christ, has paid the price to make us righteous by dying for all our sins. “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7).

Even Job finally realized that God must somehow become his redeemer. “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and . . . in my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:25-26). It is indeed wonderfully true that God can both “be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:26). HMM

Thursday, November 10

Why God Allows Choice

“And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” (1 John 4:16)

It is absolutely clear that God is love (John 3:16; 1 John 4:19) Therefore, many have suggested that such a unilateral love as is cited in the above texts would require that God eliminate any judgment for disobedience to His commands, or that He create such a condition that all humanity would naturally love God as part of their basic personality.

The apparent conflict is often repeated in the false logic “If God loves the world and is all powerful, why would He allow evil?” Simply put, the answer is this: God is love; God loves mankind; love requires that a choice be made; choice allows for the possible rejection of God’s unilateral love. God, therefore, created humanity with the ability to positively respond to His love—or to consciously reject His offer of love.

The simple truth of the Scriptures is inescapable.

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:5-10)

God allows for the possibility of evil so that human love may exist. HMM III

Friday, November 11

To End All Wars

“And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” (Isaiah 2:4)

It has been over 90 years since “The War to End All Wars” ended in victory for those who had “fought to make the world safe for democracy.” A celebration of thanksgiving followed, and a holiday was established to commemorate that great Armistice Day (now Veterans Day).

However, an even greater war soon followed, only to be repeated by innumerable local wars and revolutions. Instead of a world of liberty and democracy, many of the world’s nations are now under the brutal heel of totalitarian dictatorships. With the threat of potential nuclear obliteration hanging over the world, the prophecy of Christ is being literally fulfilled: “Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth” (Luke 21:26).

In the 25 centuries since our text was first uttered, there has been a war going on somewhere in the world at least 11 out of every 12 years, and it certainly seems unlikely that such a promise will ever be fulfilled.

Yet it is God who has promised, and only He can accomplish it. “He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people” (our text for today). “Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, . . . The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isaiah 9:7). When the Lord Jesus Christ comes again, “He shall speak peace unto the (nations): and His dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth” (Zechariah 9:10). Finally, world peace will come, and Christ “shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 11:15). HMM

Saturday, November 12

The New Covenant

“Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.” (Luke 22:20)

The Greek word *diatheke*, translated as both “testament” and “covenant,” occurs 33 times in the New Testament, 17 of which are in the book of Hebrews. The Hebrew word for “covenant” (*berith*) comes from a word meaning to “cut, or divide,” referring to the fact that blood had to be shed to bind the parties involved to the covenant. (See Genesis 15:10; Jeremiah 34:18-19.) God had made covenants with Abraham and Moses on the part of the people of Israel. He had kept His part of the agreement; but in each case the others involved “continued not in my covenant” (Hebrews 8:9). But God, in His grace, has issued a new covenant.

This covenant or testament is not unlike a human “last will and testament,” but there are some differences. He did not merely die, thereby enabling His children to inherit His fortune, but He is now “the mediator of a better covenant” (Hebrews 8:6). He is the sacrifice whose death was necessary to make the covenant binding, and yet He is the “surety of a better testament” (Hebrews 7:22).

He cannot fail, and hence the new covenant cannot be done away with. Through His death, He not only has removed the penalty for our previous failures, but qualified us to receive the inheritance. “For this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator” (Hebrews 9:15-16). “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). JDM

Sunday, November 13

Keeping the Law

“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” (James 2:10)

The law of God, centered in the Ten Commandments, is “holy, and just, and good” (Romans 7:12) and expresses perfectly the will of God for holy living. “The man that doeth them shall live in them” (Galatians 3:12).

The problem is that no man can possibly do them all. He may keep most of the commandments most of the time, but he will inevitably fail in some of them some of the time. Since the law is a divine unit, breaking any commandment—as our text reminds us—breaks the whole law, bringing the guilty one under God’s curse of death. “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Galatians 3:10). “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight” (Romans 3:20).

All men, having sinned against God’s law, are therefore lost and in urgent need of salvation. This is where God’s wonderful grace comes in. “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, . . . Even the righteousness . . . which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe” (Romans 3:21-22), “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13). He kept the law for us, and bore its curse for us: Thus we are saved through trusting Him.

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid” (Romans 6:1-2). We now desire to keep His commandments, because we love Him. “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3). We are now able to keep them, because His Spirit now lives in us, and we are “strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (Ephesians 3:16). HMM

The Marvel of Design

“And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birth-right, and the youngest according to his youth: and the men marvelled one at another.” (Genesis 43:33)

When creationists calculate the extremely low probability of the chance origin of life, many evolutionists scoff at the calculation, alleging that any one arrangement of the components of a simple, living molecule is just as likely as any other arrangement, so it is no great marvel that the components fell into this particular arrangement.

This is a puerile argument, of course, quite unworthy of the intelligent scientists who use it. There are at best only a few arrangements that will contain the organized information necessary for reproduction, compared to “zillions” of arrangements with no information at all.

This fact is beautifully illustrated in our text. Why should Joseph’s brothers “marvel” when they were seated in chronological order of birth by a host who (presumably) was entirely unaware of that order?

The reason why they marveled was because there are almost 40 million different ways (calculated by multiplying all the numbers, one through 11, together) in which the 11 brothers could have been seated! It seemingly couldn’t happen by chance.

Maybe an evolutionist would not “marvel” that this unique seating arrangement happened by chance, since he somehow believes that far more intricately organized arrangements than this happened by chance to produce our universe and its array of complex systems. Anyone else, however, would immediately have realized this, and so the brothers of Joseph “marvelled one at another.” So also, when we behold the wonders of design in the creation, we should “lift up [our] eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things” (Isaiah 40:26). HMM

Tuesday, November 15

Evil Choices Produce Evil People

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

The apostle Paul provides a chilling analysis of the process by which the human mind progresses through rejection of the evidence of God’s existence to ultimately worshiping the creature more than the Creator and finding pleasure only among those of like mind.

God has displayed His “eternal power and Godhead” since the creation of the world (Romans 1:20). Those who reject that clear physical evidence are “without excuse” since they do know God but will not recognize His existence and engage in such destructive thinking that “their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things” (Romans 1:21-23).

That foolish behavior so shifts their intellect that they serve “the creature more than the Creator” and wind up so distorting their lifestyle that they become unable to tell what gender God made them (Romans 1:24-28). Once that kind of behavior is sanctioned, their emotions become consumed with hatred of God and all things good, winding up inventing “evil things” and living within a godless world (Romans 1:29-31).

Having rejected the truth that God has openly displayed for everyone to see and having plunged into a foolish and damaging lifestyle that warps their intellect and emotions beyond repair, they can find pleasure only in those who live, think, and love as they do. All the while heaping a “treasure” of wrath that will be poured out upon them when the Creator returns (Romans 2:1-6). HMM III

Wednesday, November 16

Our Umpire in Heaven

“For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment. Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both.”
(Job 9:32-33)

Job, in his sufferings, was mystified by the complete silence of God, whom he had loved and tried to serve faithfully all his life. He longed somehow to be able to come before the great Judge to plead his case, but this was not possible, for God was not a man like himself. He did not even have a “daysman” to mediate between himself and God.

Oh, yes, he did! And so do we. A “daysman” is an arbitrator or umpire, or mediator (as this word is usually rendered in modern versions). But how could there be an umpire to mediate disputes between God and man, unless such an umpire could somehow be both God and man, able to “lay his hand upon us both”?

There is one perfect umpire, of course. “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1 Timothy 2:5-6). The ransom He paid was His own blood, with which “he entered in once [for all] into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Hebrews 9:12).

Thus, the God/man Christ Jesus is perfectly able to bridge the chasm between God and man. Perhaps an even better connotation of “daysman” is that of “advocate.” Now, when Satan, “the accuser of our brethren” (Revelation 12:10), accuses us of sin before God, as he did against Job, our great Intercessor defends us. “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1), and “he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). HMM

Thursday, November 17

Evil People Hate God's People

“Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.” (Psalm 139:21-22)

Once a conscious choice has been made to reject God's truth and love, an individual begins to hate God and the people of God. The Scriptures are replete with these insights, but two references should suffice to establish the teaching—“they that hate the righteous shall be desolate” (Psalm 34:21) and “the bloodthirsty hate the upright” (Proverbs 29:10).

Don't be surprised at the hatred of godly issues and people. “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:18-19).

Perhaps more alarming than the widespread evidence that many are running full-tilt into the “broad way” leading to destruction (Matthew 7:13) are the few who have found the “strait gait” leading to eternal life and yet continue to remain indifferent to the crisis of evil surrounding our country, our churches, and our families.

Would God that our leaders would have the same passion the psalmist felt when he wrote, “Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law” (Psalm 119:53). Perhaps it is time that we each feel something of the godly sorrow that caused “rivers of waters [to] run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law” (Psalm 119:136) or sense an ache when we “beheld the transgressors, and [were] grieved; because they kept not thy word” (Psalm 119:158).

As our text notes, “I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.” “Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me” (Psalm 101:6). HMM III

Evil Hearts Produce Evil Deeds

“And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” (John 3:19)

Make no mistake—those who love evil hate righteousness. Petty selfishness is often invoked to justify a host of social evils, and the sin burden constantly overlays human behavior. But an evil heart produces evil deeds and drives an evil person to commit atrocities. “For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved” (John 3:20).

Both the apostles James and Paul made the same observation. James noted that “wars and fightings” come from the “lusts that war in your members” (James 4:1). Paul bemoaned the conflict of “laws” that he sensed in his own body and called himself a “wretched man” because he couldn’t seem to shake the “law of sin” (Romans 7:18-24).

The beloved apostle John insisted that the twice-born should never love the world or “the things that are in the world” because “all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:15-16).

Once a decision is made to reject the overwhelming evidence of the “eternal power and Godhead” that the Creator has displayed for all to see (Romans 1:20), and once the personal conviction of the Holy Spirit has been spurned (John 16:7-11), nothing remains but social pressure to do good. And when that wanes (as it surely will), the individual cycles every more rapidly into a godless lifestyle, falling away “from the faith . . . having their conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:1-2). HMM III

Saturday, November 19

The Captain of Our Salvation

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” (Hebrews 2:9-10)

Christ is referred to in this passage as the captain of our salvation. The word translated captain implies one who is first in line, the beginning, or the originator. So Christ is discovered to be the first in line of an endless procession of the saints of all ages resurrected from the grave and marching to the ultimate realization of their salvation. He is truly “the first born among many brethren” (Romans 8:29). “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20).

The word finds usage only three other times in the New Testament, each within a resurrection and glorification context. Peter, addressing the people of Israel, said that they had “killed the Prince [originator] of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses” (Acts 3:15). And later, “the God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince [leader] and a Saviour” (Acts 5:30-31). As a result of what our “Captain” has done, we should be “looking unto Jesus the author [same word] 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).

The only way we could ever share in His glory is for Him to suffer and die. “Both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Hebrews 2:11). JDM

Sunday, November 20

Let God Be True

“For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written. That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.” (Romans 3:3-4)

Many Christians are so intimidated by the arrogant unbelief of the supposed intellectuals of the world that they either reject or compromise or ignore the difficult teachings of Scripture. This is a grievous mistake, for all of God’s “sayings” are “justified” and He will surely “overcome” all those who presume to “judge” Him and His Word.

The only reason to believe in evolution, for example, is the fact that most such intellectuals believe it. There is no real evidence, either in the Bible or in science, for evolution or any other form of unbelief, yet many professed believers in Christ seem to have “loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:43). Therefore they assume that God does not really mean what He says in His Word, thereby making faith in His Word “without effect.”

God’s truth is not determined, however, by taking a vote, or by the opinions of skeptics, or by metaphysical speculation. It is determined by God Himself, and none other, “for the word of the LORD is right; and all his works are done in truth” (Psalm 33:4).

Therefore, as our text commands: “Let God be true, but every man a liar.” The very criterion of truth is the Word of God. It is good to explain God’s Word to those open to its truth, but never to explain it away, by some compromising accommodation to current scientism. “Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever” (Psalm 119:160). The Lord Jesus confessed, unreservedly, “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17), and so should we. HMM

Monday, November 21

Global Conflict Centers on God's People

“God that made the world . . . hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.” (Acts 17:24, 26)

The foundation for global conflict lies in God's promise to Abraham: “I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 12:2-3). The son of promise (Isaac) and the son of the bondwoman (Ishmael) are at the crux of the issue (Galatians 4:22-31). In eternity's eyes, all the petty politics and power plays of the nations are “dust of the balance” (Isaiah 40:15).

Anyone familiar with biblical history will know that God dealt with the nations of the world as tools of influence, reward, and punishment to Israel. After Abraham generated the beginnings of Israel's enemies through Ishmael and Jacob began another line of enmity through Esau, the stories of the Canaanite conquest under Joshua and the subsequent 400 years of the time of the Judges relate the conflicts that culminated in the united kingdom under Saul, David, and Solomon.

Nearly half of the remaining Old Testament records the efforts by God to deal with Israel and Judah after the civil war begun by Solomon's son, Rehoboam. That concluded with the Assyrian captivity and disbursement of the northern 10 tribes and the 70-year captivity of Judah under Babylon.

The nearly two millennia from Abraham to the coming of the Messiah have been followed by two millennia of a spiritual “déjà vu” through the church the Lord Jesus started. God's promise is that both Israel and the church will find satisfaction and success when He returns to finalize and fulfill the promise made to Abraham so long ago. HMM III

Tuesday, November 22

The Danger of Willful Sin

“Because he hath despised the word of the LORD, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him.” (Numbers 15:31)

Under the Mosaic law, there was ample provision for forgiveness of sins committed unintentionally. “If any soul sin through ignorance, then he shall bring a she goat of the first year for a sin offering. And the priest shall make an atonement for the soul that sinneth ignorantly, . . . and it shall be forgiven him” (Numbers 15:27-28). However, as in our text, it was altogether different for one who deliberately disobeyed God’s law. One who would so despise God’s commandment was to be put to death.

In this Christian dispensation, many would say that this harshness of God’s law has been replaced by His love. There is abundant pardon for all, since Jesus died for all our sins. Now, all we need is to confess our sins, and He will forgive us (1 John 1:9). But, “if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, . . . He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?” (Hebrews 10:26, 28-29).

Even assuming this warning applies specifically only to those who have wilfully renounced faith in Christ, the question still remains whether one with true saving faith will wilfully sin against the known will of God, as revealed in His Word. “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4). Only God knows the heart, but those “Christians” who deliberately reject and disobey His Word should at least “examine [them] selves, whether [they] be in the faith” (2 Corinthians 13:5).

HMM

Wednesday, November 23

The Prosperity of the Ungodly

“Righteous art thou, O LORD, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?” (Jeremiah 12:1)

One of the perennial theological problems is the apparent prosperity of the ungodly along with the suffering of the righteous. Why would God seem to endorse such a system?

It has been this way for ages. Some 2,000 or more years before Christ, Job asked essentially the same question as did the prophet Jeremiah in our text above. “Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? . . . They spend their days in wealth, and . . . say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways” (Job 21:7, 13-14). Likewise, the psalmist Asaph complained, “I was envious . . . when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (Psalm 73:3).

The real solution to this paradox is not in this present world, but in the world to come, where hell awaits the ungodly, and heaven awaits those whom God has redeemed through faith in Christ. The fact that a man may prosper materially is not necessarily a measure of God’s approval. The previous economic boom in this country made many men very wealthy, and most of them seem either indifferent or hostile to God, but their wealth is very ephemeral. As David said in another psalm, “I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not” (Psalm 37:35-36).

If God does give a few believers material wealth, it is so that they may use it for the Lord and for others, not to pamper themselves. “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but . . . that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to [share]” (1 Timothy 6:17-18). HMM

Thursday, November 24

Fullness of Blessing

“And I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.” (Romans 15:29)

One beautiful characteristic of life in Christ is its fullness. Jesus Christ is Himself “the fullness of him that filleth all in all” (Ephesians 1:23), and He does everything to the full! When He fed the multitude, there were 12 baskets left over (John 6:13); when He brought in the miraculous catch of fishes, the nets were so full that they broke, and the boats so full they began to sink (Luke 5:6-7).

First of all, He gives fullness of grace. “And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16). Then comes fullness of joy and peace: “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” (John 15:11). “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing” (Romans 15:13).

It is then possible—in fact, we are commanded—to be “filled with the Spirit . . . making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:18-19). Not only does the Holy Spirit indwell us, but so do the Father and the Son, by the Spirit. Jesus said: “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23). In this way, the triune God indwells us, and thereby we “know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that [we] might be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:19).

All the fullness of God! In Jesus Christ “dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him” (Colossians 2:9-10), “for it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell” (Colossians 1:19). With the resources of such fullness of blessing available to us, we should be constantly growing “unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). HMM

Friday, November 25

Belief Systems Drive Global Events

“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” (1 John 2:16-17)

In the broadest sense, there are only two belief systems: theism and naturalism. One believes in supernatural influence on the affairs of men and as the foundation of purpose and order, the other does not. The vast majority of the world is theistic (though not creationist) in its worldview. Only the “civilized world” is arrogant enough to consciously exclude the supernatural from its thinking. But this is the key: “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). This is why we are clearly told, “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

Underlying all, of course, is the great Adversary, who seeks to draw the worship of all men to himself and replace all “gods” as the god of this world. Satan is driven, like “a roaring lion,” to devour all who oppose him (1 Peter 5:8). The real war is a spiritual one (Ephesians 6:12-13). President George W. Bush was correct when he insisted that the campaign against modern terrorism will be “unlike any other we have ever seen.” It will be worldwide in scope, transcultural in impact, and years in the execution.

Will terrorists be eliminated and evil conquered? Not until Jesus Christ sets up His millennial reign. But we can “overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21), and we can “reign in life” (Romans 5:17). Freedom is administered through truth (John 8:32, 36), and Satan, when resisted in “the faith” (1 Peter 5:9), will “flee” (James 4:7). HMM III

Saturday, November 26

I Am Christ's Friend

“Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.” (John 15:15)

Some things in Scripture are harder to understand and believe than others. Christ, the Sovereign Creator of all things, the offended Judge who declared the penalty for sin to be death, the One who willingly died to pay that penalty and redeem us from bondage to sin, now calls us His friends. Certainly we would like to consider Him our friend; but are we really His friends? If He were telling someone about His friends, would He include us? Somehow this seems too much—too good to be true; but He insists it is.

Actually, Christ said, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you” (John 15:16). We are His friends by conscious choice on His part, even though He knows more about our inward nature than we will admit to ourselves. He has demonstrated His friendship by the greatest act of love imaginable, when He voluntarily died to save us from our sins. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (v. 13). Furthermore, for His friends He promises, “Whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you” (v. 16).

His love for us surpasses human love. “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love” (v. 9) “that your joy might be full” (v. 11). He has “ordained” us as friends so that we “should go and bring forth fruit, and that [our] fruit should remain” (v. 16). What joy!

There should be a response on our part to His friendship. Almost as a self-evident fact, He states, “Ye are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you” (v. 14), among other things, “that ye love one another” (v. 17). How can we do less? JDM

Sunday, November 27

The Devil Never Rests

“And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.” (Job 1:7)

This remarkable scene in heaven provides us a striking picture of Satanic activity. The devil, in his opposition to God and His program of salvation, evidently never rests. He is not omnipresent, like God, because he is a finite (though very powerful and brilliant) created being. To accomplish his goal, therefore, he is never at rest, but keeps going from place to place and working deception after deception, bringing everyone he can under his influence.

Therefore, God urgently warns us: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

The same is true of the demonic spirits who have followed the devil in his rebellion against God. They never rest until they can take possession of some person’s body and mind and then control that person’s behavior. “When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out” (Matthew 12:43-44).

This restlessness that characterizes the devil and his demons often also manifests itself in the unsaved, and this will be the ultimate state of those who yield to the pressures of these evil spirits. “They have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name” (Revelation 14:11).

True rest of soul is found only in Christ, with His forgiveness, cleansing, and guidance: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matthew 11:28-29). HMM

The Intercessor

“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.”
(1 Timothy 2:1-2)

When we pray for others, we not only are helping to assure a good life for ourselves—as our text indicates—but, more importantly, we are thereby becoming more like Christ. On the cross itself, “he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12). Since His return to heaven, He has been continually occupied with His ministry of intercession. “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). “It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Romans 8:34).

Not only is our resurrected, glorified Savior perpetually interceding for us in heaven, but also, the indwelling Holy Spirit is praying for us here. “For we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit [Himself] maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:26-27).

Now if both God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are always interceding for us before God the Father, we surely ought to be willing to spend time in prayer for others down here—not only for our loved ones, but even for those who have hurt us. Jesus said, “Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

May God help us to be faithful in this vital ministry of intercession. HMM

Tuesday, November 29

Works of Darkness

“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” (Ephesians 5:11)

What are these “works of darkness” which we must avoid? Some of these works are enumerated in Romans 13:12-13: “Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, . . . not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.” A Christian is thus to “cast off” all such works of darkness from his or her own life, to “have no fellowship” with those who practice them, and even to openly “reprove them.”

“This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness” (Ephesians 4:17-19). Such works of darkness stem directly from a denial of God as sovereign: “When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, . . . and their foolish heart was darkened” (Romans 1:21). This darkening of the heart is soon followed by a darkening of the life: “Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness. . . . Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient” (Romans 1:24, 28).

In these days of moral confusion, with attitudes and actions once outlawed by society now being defended and favored (e.g., sexual promiscuity and perversion), and with once-honored attributes now ridiculed (e.g., chastity, spirituality), there are great pressures on Christians to compromise with these works of darkness. God and His standards do not change, however, and He still expects us to shun and reprove them. HMM

Wednesday, November 30

The People Said, “Amen”

“Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the LORD.”
(Psalm 106:48)

Many is the speaker who, after he has made some point which he considers especially good, will then say: “And all the people said, ‘Amen’” (meaning “that’s right!”).

It is interesting to note the biblical examples of such a demonstration. There are 16 times in which this or a similar statement occurs in the Bible—all in the Old Testament. Twelve of these are found in Deuteronomy 27:14-26 with the people so responding after the pronouncement of a “curse” on those who commit various sins. The last curse is as follows: “Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen” (v. 26) in agreement with the judgment.

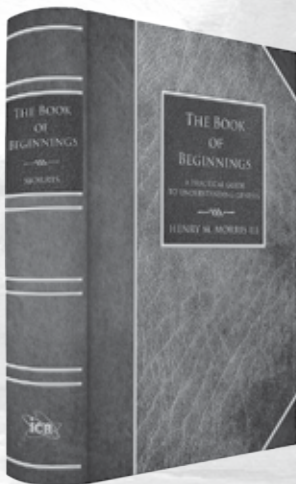
King David described his thanksgiving for the return of the Ark of the Covenant with, “Blessed be the LORD God of Israel for ever and ever. And all the people said, Amen, and praised the LORD” (1 Chronicles 16:36). When Jerusalem’s wall restoration was being delayed and Nehemiah had to rebuke some of his people for their covetousness, threatening God’s judgment on them if they did not repent, then “all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the Lord. And the people did according to this promise” (Nehemiah 5:13). After the wall was finished, as Ezra read the Scriptures to the people, “Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen” (Nehemiah 8:6). The final such reference is in our text.

If we follow biblical precedent, therefore, whenever God’s Word is read to a congregation, either in denunciation of sin or thanksgiving for blessing and revival, or simply in praising the Lord for His eternal goodness, it is appropriate for the people to respond with a heartfelt “Amen!” HMM

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