

Prepare *the* Way

Issue No. 130

PREPARING THE BRIDE OF CHRIST FOR THE RETURN OF CHRIST

Peter Pollock:
**Believer
pandemic**

**Your personal
revival**

**How to be
filled with
the Spirit**

**If God is
so good,
why does He
let me hurt?**



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A tried people

YOU will never get to the place in your Christian experience where you will be above temptation and trial. Jesus was tempted of the devil. He was a "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." We shall always be subject to temptation, but we can be more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

"God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13)."

You will be tempted and tried. Real Bible salvation will not always keep you on the mountaintop of feeling. Some may wonder why they cannot always feel the blessing. That is not according to God's Word, because the Bride of Christ is in her tribulation today, and the Word says, "The just shall live by faith (Hebrews 10:38)."

The tribulation of the world is coming after the Bride is taken away, but the tribulation of the saints of God is in their lives today. Many times you wonder why you shed tears and go through heart sufferings, your spirit being oppressed. God says, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivers him out of them all (Psalm 34:19)."

His Word declares that afflictions shall come to the child of God. He wants a people tested and tried, proved and made pure through suffering, through temptation and tribulation. He says, "I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction (Isaiah 48:10)."

We are living in the most awful age of the world. There never was a time with such privileges and opportunities; and yet there never was a time when the onslaughts of Satan were so great as today. You may not understand why it is you have times of tests and trials so strange. But we read, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you (1 Peter 4:12)."

God would never have a perfect people if He did not try them. He must have a people "purified, and made white, and tried." It is easy when everything is coming our way and we feel the glory and the smile of heaven, but that is not what makes a tried-out people. We must endure hardness, walk by faith, and penetrate right through to the throne of God by faith in Him.

We are going through the humiliation with Jesus Christ. But oh, to think that some day we shall rise with Him, and these vile bodies shall put on incorruption! We shall be like His glorious body. Some day the perfection of beauty will be seen on God's children, when "We shall see Him as He is."

He may lay you low; He will put you in the dust. But we read in the Word, "Every one that exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted (Luke 18:14)." We have found God's Word to be true. Oh, that we might get our hearts in an attitude before God to say, "I surrender; I lay my life at the foot of the Cross, an empty vessel. Do what You will with me, but I will stand; I will be obedient to the 'heavenly vision!'"

It means much to walk this way alone, but we must be faithful to God. God is striving to get His people ready to meet Him in the air. We must be tried and purified until the coming of the Lord. 🐟



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Your personal revival

by James A. Stewart

THE burden of my life is that the Lord will revive His work. For this reason, I am tried by many of God's people because they are living only half-heartedly instead of being 100 percent for the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am longing and praying for a worldwide revival because I believe the days of revival are not past. As long as the blessed Holy Spirit Himself abides and works on the earth, the church's potential is the same as it was in apostolic days.

I believe that God wants to send us a mighty tidal wave of the Spirit to all the churches. We have seen this happen again and again in our own ministry, resulting in the salvation of thousands. I have many reasons for believing that God wants to send revival in these days to you, my brother and sister, and these have to do with His plans and purposes for the lives of His redeemed ones.

God is never content in any age for His people to live below the standard which He has set for His Son's Bride. No man is satisfied that his bride be subnormal. Far less can our Father be content for one moment to see His church anything less than holy and powerful, living in vital communion with Himself as He has purposed. A subnormal and backslidden church is an insult and disgrace to a holy, powerful, almighty God.

What each child of God needs is a personal revival. An old Methodist saint in Britain quaintly drew a chalk mark around himself and said, "O Lord, revive everybody within this circle!" This was getting close!

That was making things personal and practical. Are you prepared for such drastic measures?

Mr Moody put it very plainly when he said, "There are in the churches stores of unconsecrated wealth, unused or misused power, multitudes at ease in Zion, witnesses who give not witness for the Lord, workers without the Spirit's conquering power, disciples who follow afar off, forms without life, church machinery substituted for inward life

and power."

Alas, as the result of not being filled with the Holy Spirit, we have many believers deprived of untold riches in Christ which the indwelling Spirit would minister to them were He but permitted to fill them. The illimitable resources and immeasurable power which are potentially theirs in Christ lie idle and unused, waiting to be realised in the life by the infilling and controlling presence of the Spirit of Christ.

The might of God

God's power toward us is declared in the first chapter of Ephesians to be none other than that transcending might of God by which Christ was raised up from the dead and exalted and enthroned at the Father's right hand. As the deliverance out of Egypt was the token of God's power on behalf of His covenant people, so Christ's resurrection exemplifies the exceeding greatness of divine potency which is available in the Holy Spirit for the life and work of the church.

Think of all the potentialities of a Spirit-filled life (Ephesians 1:17-23). But also see the tragedy in the fact that tens of thousands of Christians are selling their spiritual birthright for a mess of pottage.

Oh yes, they are saved. They have been regenerated by the work of the Holy Ghost. They are bound for glory. But oh, so many have no desire for the deep things of God, no yearning, no thirst to be filled with the Spirit, to possess all their possessions in the Lord Jesus. Potentially, the moment He is received into the life as Saviour everything that He possesses becomes the property of the believer. But, ah, one can only receive the marvellous gifts and enjoy the blessed experiences as he appropriates them for himself.

What ignorance many of God's people display, living as they do below the level of all the spiritual blessings which are wrapped up in the Lord Jesus Christ in the heavenlies, simply because their eyes are blinded by the devil. They have

become carnal and lack joy in the Christian life. They have no desire to go on in the deep things of God.

On the other hand, David prayed, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God (Psalm 42:1)."

There is a solemn indictment against the people of God. It is that they are not hungering and thirsting after the things of God. They are not longing to have a genuine work of God in their midst but instead they crave excitement. They are often bored, not interested. Yet the only way to see God working in the life, the only way to be filled and anointed with the Holy Spirit, the only way to experience a revival – is by hungering after Him!

"On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink (John 7:37).'"

We must remember that there is all the difference in the world between the believer's possession of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit's possession of the believer. We can never say that a believer has not the Holy Spirit, but there is a sad possibility that the Spirit of God does not possess the believer.

What a tragedy, what a heartbreak it would be for us to reach the Gloryland and have to look back and see that we were not all that God intended us to be, that we were living disappointed, meagre Christian lives when all the time we should have been multi-millionaires in our risen Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who is rejected, and yet it is only He who can bring the believer experimentally into a wealthy place in Christ and reveal all that divine power which potentially is his in Jesus Christ.

Only the Holy Spirit can make these things real and precious and true in our hearts and lives. It's sadly possible to have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ and to be on the way to Glory and yet to be only half-hearted, following afar off. The life of one who is not a soul winner, who has no passion for souls, no hunger for God's Word and no thirst for a fuller richer life in Christ, is a contradiction to the glorious Gospel of the Redeemer. He does not carry the fragrance of the Lord Jesus. The one remedy for this deplorable condition is to be filled with the Spirit. Then the life will be full of power and will tell for the Redeemer. 🐟

Believer pandemic

by Peter Pollock

FOR more than four decades it's been my privilege to serve the Lord as an evangelist. And no doubt due to the cricketing background, I have travelled extensively and uniquely in terms of being inter-denominational. Baptists, Dutch Reformed, Anglican, Presbyterian, Charismatic, Pentecostal and Faith pulpits have been extensively open to the ministry!

And I have lived in the real world of sin and repentance, heaven and hell and genuine regeneration. When Jesus comes into a life that life changes. No change, no Jesus! Its life or death – as matter-of-fact as that!

However, one question has continually burdened me. How come so many people sit week after week in churches untouched and unchanged. How come so many would question themselves about whether they really know Jesus, even among leaderships?

So many confess that they battle to put Jesus number one in their lives. In the parable of the soils, only one comes through – that's just 25 percent. And the greatest tragedy is that two of the soils – that's 50 percent - are in the church and don't make it!

The 10 virgins sees half of them going to hell. We have recently had Easter – my 82nd Easter! Easters come and go, and the world doesn't change. In fact, modernly it's just got worse and worse – Easters are meaningless. They are just words, semantics, making no difference to your life whatsoever unless you believe...

Unless you utterly, totally, unreservedly appropriate it – heart, soul, mind and strength – it is a waste. Unbelief and faith is a huge challenge, a bigger challenge than we like to acknowledge. And your will is the key.

God gave us our own wills that we

might even be granted the right to decide about Him. He has ordained it so. We are thus the consequences of our decision-making processes.

We are where we choose to be, and we can't blame anybody else.

You are where you believe – but unfortunately today “believe” actually means “I sort of think so” rather than that I am utterly convicted!

That father who brought his son to Jesus was asked if he believed. His first response was, of course that he believed, but when he looked into the face of Jesus and realised the magnitude of the problem, he uttered the truth: “Help me in my unbelief!”

They want to believe

So many so-called believers are in this position. They want to believe, they know they should believe – but the bottom line is that, tragically, they don't.

We are not helped by a world full of exaggerations and lies. Day in and day out, our TV presents us propaganda untruths. I mean Father Christmas is a lie, so is the Easter bunny or the tooth fairy.

Satan just smiles! All is going to plan in his anti-Christ campaign. The Bible is now just another book to most people, it's just another opinion. Unbelief is downloaded as acceptable in our computer-crazed minds. Post-modernism is entrenched, and the fall out is extensive.

John 3:16 is the greatest statement of love in the Bible, but it clearly underlines that if you don't believe you “perish” – you go to hell!

And “believe” is a continuous verb, meaning that it is ongoing – so you need to do as He says if you love Him.

We are further reminded that if we don't believe we will “remain condemned” and the “wrath of God will remain upon us.”

Yes, as per John 19, the condemnation, the verdict, the judgement, the crux, the crunch is that the “Light” came into the world and we did not accept Him – we did not believe. This underlines “unbelief” as the greatest of all sins, the sort of father of all sins, the worst, the most damning original sin of the world that Jesus never died for.

A virus

Simply if you don't believe you won't appropriate Him and you will miss out. God's wrath and condemnation rests on unbelief. It is the spiritual AIDS attacking the Christian immune system, it is a virus of pandemic proportions!

“Yes, but...” is blatant, bald, bold, brazen unbelief – a one-way ticket to hell and damnation. To get to hell all you have to do is keep walking!

At the bottom end of the garden 40-odd years ago I met an “absolute” Jesus. I believed! I repented! I sobbed bitterly! He arrived! And life for me would never ever be the same again.

It was childlike, absolute, with no ifs and buts. I believed with all my heart, soul, mind and strength. It was total, it was sold-out. My hand was on the plough. I was not up for looking back!

“Don't look back (Luke 9:57-62).” “Follow Me,” said Jesus! “Wait Lord... let me first!” No room for that. No man, looking back is fit for the kingdom. I want to bury my father, say goodbye. “Let the dead bury the dead,” said Jesus!

Harsh? Jesus knew that returning home he would be affected by unbelieving relatives, weeping and manipulating. Worldliness is terribly infectious.

The disciples didn't look back! “Where else can we go?” They had closed the door. They had burnt their bridges.

Looking back is questioning. It's doubt! It's unbelief!

Without childlike faith and trust, the Christian stands “naked,” exposed to all the worldly doubts, fears and unbeliefs. Sadly, there are multitudes of “naked” believers, tired of the struggle, the hardships, the long delays, the lonely times and the pains and sorrows.

Many have set aside all confidence in God. Some are lukewarm, some are angry and some are disillusioned. Because “wickedness and evil are on the increase the love of many has grown cold (Matthew 24:12).”

Apostate and unbelieving

Revelation warns that the visible “church” will be lukewarm, it will be apathetic. It will have lost its first love and be up for being “spewed out,” “blotted out,” apostate and unbelieving.

Certainly, it's not an easy road. It's all about overcomers and overcoming – and most certainly not a walk in the park!

As Oswald Chambers points out, we are partakers in His suffering. It's about patience. It's about obedience. It's about suffering, and it's about persecution. These are all the hallmarks of faith!

The prophet Habakkuk was crying out to God over the situation of the world. Gods answers: “Stand Back. Be amazed. You ain't seen nothing yet!”

Daniel's friends, when the King tried to encourage them about being saved from the fire, answered that if God didn't rescue them they would still hang in. It wasn't about their comfort and miracles.

Fear and despondency are from the pit of hell, and to languish in self-pity is spiritual corruption of the worst kind. Without faith and trust, it is impossible to please God. Some don't think so! They say it's human nature to question God; it's okay to even get angry with God. It's not okay!

Doubt is the cancer of the modern church. It spawns unbelief. The devil's infamous “surely not” in the Garden of Eden sows doubt. And this subtle evil produces spiritual paupers!

“They were unable to enter (Hebrews 3:19) and “broke off (Romans 11:20)” because of unbelief. In times of revival, unbelief damns you to sit unmoved, uncalled and unsaved.

Why don't we pray or obey? The answer is very simple. We don't believe in a Higher Authority.

“Unbelief is sin, it is the summit of arrogance.” writes Charles Spurgeon. “It is the monarch of sins, the prolific parent of all guilt and begets and fosters all iniquity,” adds Spurgeon.

One of the great problems in the modern world is that we strive, obsessed about avoiding financial poverty. Physical and material poverty we also fight like the plague, but we just don't think that spiritual poverty is a big deal. We don't believe, and we don't care!

Even with Christians backsliding – lukewarmness and doubt are considered as common and acceptable as the annual flu.

It is not okay to doubt! Every “unbeliever” lives with the fruit of his rejection. You are where you have chosen to be – where your faith, trust and belief have dictated.

John 5:40 has Jesus telling us that we obsessively study and analyse the scriptures day and night because we believe we will find eternal life in them. Jesus confirms that the scriptures do reveal God's truth, but the major problem is that “you just don't come to Me.”

It's all about an experiential relationship, for in Him we live and move and have out being. There is just too much emphasis on intellectual understanding of scripture rather than the simple childlike issue of coming to Him.

One world-famous evangelist often said: “You don't have to understand, you just have to hold His hand.”

The definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1 is that you have to be sure of what you hope for and certain of what you do not see. Very challenging, but more so when you consider the other side of that coin – that if you are not sure of what you hope for and certain of what you don't see, you don't have faith.

You would be surprised how often even leaders and believers confess “Peter how can you be so sure? So categoric?” Others say “Your conviction frightens me.” And it is truly a battle for large number of believers to put Jesus number one in their lives, especially when they come to understand this in

the context of even their own wives and families.

Hebrews 12:1-3 talks about the besetting sin of unbelief that weighs us down in a world that so powerfully ministers its evil on a daily basis into our lives. These days, this evil isn't just knocking on the front door it is actually forcing its way into our minds with great deception – as prophesied about the end times.

Hebrews 11: “Faith is to be sure of what you hope for and certain of what you do not see. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at Gods command. By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain. By faith in ‘holy fear’ Noah ‘condemned’ the world and became an heir of righteousness. Yes, by faith he preached fire and brimstone.

“By faith Abraham ‘responded’ though he had ‘no idea’ where he was going. By faith Moses regarded “disgrace” for the sake of Christ as “greater value” than the treasures of Egypt. By Faith Enoch was ‘taken away.’”

And the cherry on the top of the faith chapter: “They did not receive the things that were promised; they only saw them and welcomed them at a distance. Admitted they were aliens and strangers on earth.”

Unbelief is the father of all sins

Unbelief is the father of all sins and the father of all lies and far, far too many of us are caught up in the devil's web of doubt and deception. It's a no-brainer not to believe, says Josh McDowall – but it's rife.

In the Wilderness the people lived off Moses. They had no faith of their own. Modernly, we hear the word preached, and promise to follow but sadly just end up feeding on others, and not Jesus. We feed on tapes, seminars, experiences and fellowship.

Congregations are living off others' experiences. You can't get born again except in Jesus Christ. You can't get it from anyone else. Only Jesus!

And you need your own personal, intimate experience. Cling to Jesus with all your heart and will. Closet prayers and intimate fasting lead the way. Believing does not have reservations. Doubt cancels faith. Narrow is the road. Few are saved. Glory be to God! ☞

Set your soul to go through with God



by *Honore Osberg*

DOWN through the years Christian have been setting their souls to go through with God. Like Jesus who “set His face like a flint,” they have refused to be turned back.

Charles Studd, famous sportsman of Cambridge University, found a greater love than cricket when he found Christ as his Saviour.

Studd wanted God’s guidance for his life, so he sought it through prayer and reading the Bible. He asked counsel, too, of his friends. Finally, Studd decided he would study law until God clearly revealed His will to him.

One day he picked up an atheistic tract which challenged the reality of Christian faith. The atheist said if he believed, as Christians do, in an eternal existence, he would put everything he had into seeking souls, from early morning until late at night.

Here was the answer to Charlie Studd’s heart cry for guidance. He was stung into action by an atheist to go as “all out” for God as he had for cricket.

“I at once saw,” he said, “that this was the truly consistent Christian life. When

I looked back upon my life, I saw how inconsistent it had been. I therefore determined that from that time forth my life should be consistent. I set myself to know what was God’s will for me!”

That was the moment in Charles Studd’s life when he set his soul to go through with God.

Act of the soul decides the goal

It is the “set of the soul,” as the poet has expressed it, which decides our goal.

Our human wills are comparable to the sails of a boat. When we have set our will to go through with God, then the storms of temptation and trial and conflict will not swerve us from our course. Instead, all these are used, as a sailor uses a headwind, to carry us forward.

God recognises this determined setting of our will to do His will. And the Bible encourages those who are naturally weak. They, too, can go through with God if they set their sails in the beginning.

Consider Simon Peter. The Lord knew all about him – his weak, wavering

nature. Even his name Simon, which means a reed, betrayed his character. A reed is blown in every direction by the wind.

But Jesus did not see only the unstable, impetuous man. He saw beyond the rough, self-confident fisherman with all his faults and weaknesses to the man that Peter would become because of the set of his soul.

It was no immediate, miraculous transformation. Peter had many failures. But his decision to follow Christ kept him on the right course. Every time Peter hit into a squall in his life, he straightened up and kept right on.

Peter eventually became a power for God. Fear, weakness, bluster – all these were gone. Boldly he preached on the Day of Pentecost until his hearers were pricked in their hearts and 3 000 souls turned to Christ in one day. He triumphed over the stormy trials of life because his sails were set the right way.

John Wesley, unlike Peter, had natural strength of character. But if he had not strongly set himself to do the will of God, he might have yielded to temptations to swerve from his course.

There was a pull on his heart toward many things in this world. He was a scholar, but he put aside his love for books. He spent much of his life on horseback, riding from one poor church to another, helping men and women to find Christ.

Wesley had a passion for the art of this world, especially for music and architecture. But he used his talents, instead, to bring the richer beauty and light and glory of the love of Christ into the sad, dark lives of men. As he tenderly pointed them to Christ who could mend their shattered hearts, it helped him to forget his own broken and “inly bleeding heart.”

Ecstasy of beholding the beauty

One day he visited the home of a wealthy Englishman. As he looked at the well-kept grounds, he felt the sheer ecstasy which tugs at the heart when beholding beauty.

“I, too,” Wesley said, “enjoy these things – but there is another world.” His soul was set to reach that better world.

When we set our wills to go through with God, He does not always require us to give up other worthy goals. But He counsels us to seek “first the kingdom of God” – and then these other things will be added to our lives.

Moses had the chance to rule an earthly nation. But he set his soul for the things of God; he chose rather to “suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season (Hebrews 11:25).” And after Moses made that choice, God gave him a high position of spiritual leadership over the people of Israel.

John Wanamaker, as a boy, was always building air castles. “Some day,” he would say, “I’ll have a big store where you can buy whatever you want, all from the same store.”

When he was only 12 years old, he became a Christian. His friends told him this would end his plans to become a famous merchant. But John asked, “Isn’t God able to use a Christian businessman?”

Then and there John Wanamaker set his sail to prove that he could be both a successful businessman and a faithful Christian. The store he finally built in

downtown Philadelphia became the first department store in the entire world.

After 60 years of business life, Wanamaker could say, “Religion is the only investment that pays the largest dividends possible, to receive both in this life and in that which is to come.”

So down through the years, Christians have been setting their souls to go through with God.

Paul the apostle was warned by his friends of the storms which were ahead of him. But Paul’s reply was, “I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 21:13).” Paul’s mind was made up. He was going to do “one thing,” to “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14).”


It is the set of the soul which will determine the course of our lives. Catastrophe enriches one life and pauperizes another. Physical deformity makes a poet of one man and a pirate of another. Two boats on the water may be

going different directions, and yet they are propelled by the same wind.

Finding God in poverty

Poverty helps one man to find God, and he becomes a minister. By tacking his sail, he goes against the winds of adversity. But another man, who lives in the same poor district, goes with the wind and becomes a gangster.

So set your sails the right way. Seek God with all your heart, and make a complete surrender of your will to His will. Commit your life into God’s keeping. Let Him be the Captain of your life.

*“One ship drives east, another west,
By the selfsame winds that blow;
‘Tis the set of the sail, and not the gale,
That determines the way they go.
Like the winds at sea are the daily tests
As we voyage on through life:
‘Tis the set of the soul that determines the goal
And not the calm or the strife.”* 




CONSECRATE YOUR ALL

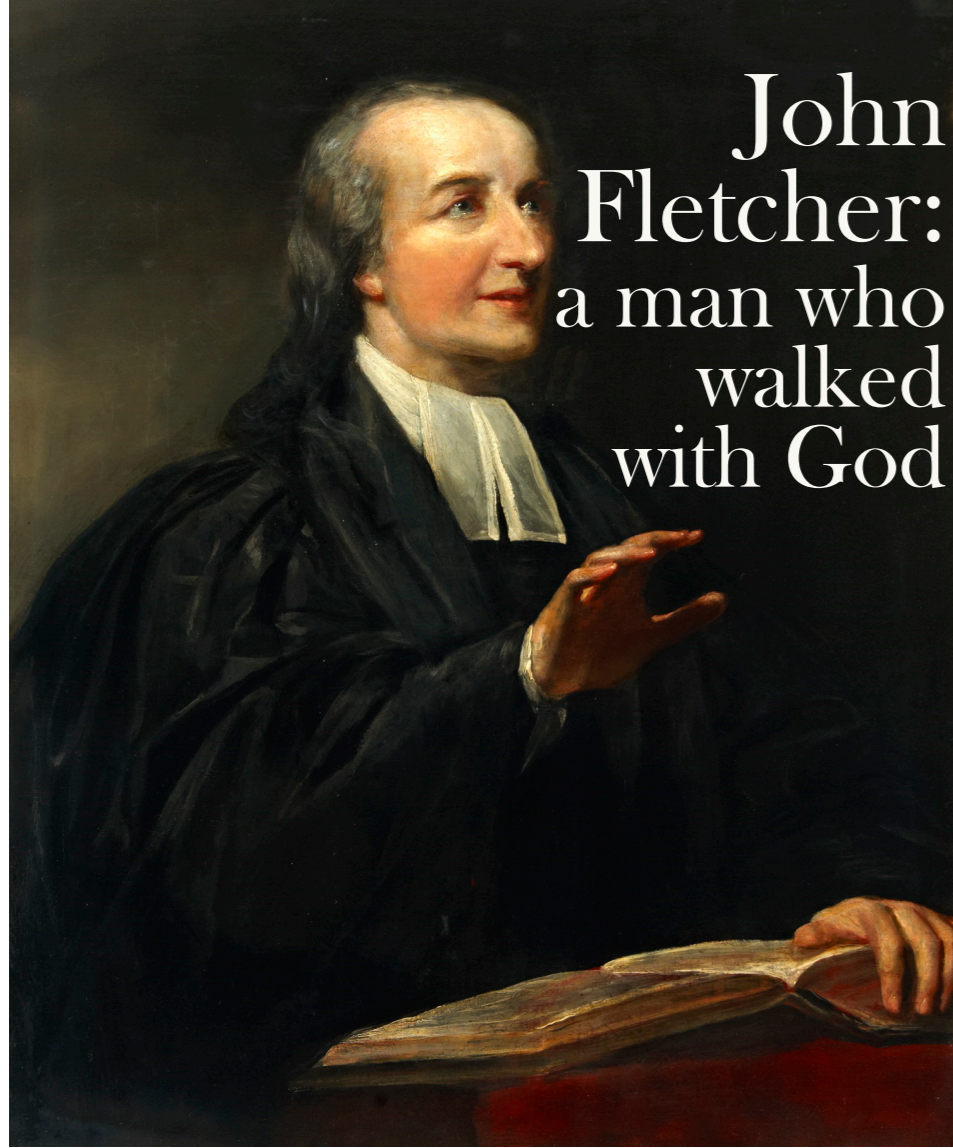
EVERY honest heart is earnestly desiring to know the deeper things of God and to walk in deep consecration and obedience, willing at any cost to have God reveal the truth to him, in any way He sees fit. He is willing to have the Word of God and the Spirit reveal to him the true condition of his soul. It is a wonderful thing to have the whole heart open to God, that He may talk to you and show you your heart’s condition before it is too late.

Do you long for God to speak to you? If you fall before Him with a broken and contrite spirit, He will do the work. Open your heart to God and His holy Word. Consecrate your all. God will do the rest and make use of the consecrated vessel.

He will use anyone who is wholly consecrated to Him. Throw your life upon God, every avenue of your soul. Have no ambition to be something great, but prostrate yourself at His feet. Lay your life before Him. Consecrate your all. How quickly He will pick it up and make it a blessing!

As Christ’s coming draws near, we are pressing in to the holy place with Him, that we might draw the Divine life of the Son of God into our lives daily. The Spirit of God is drawing His children deeper and deeper as the day approaches.

We cannot let the simplicity of the pure Gospel leave our lives. We must press on, through every test, trial, and opposing power of the enemy, to shed, if necessary, every drop of blood in our bodies. 



John Fletcher: a man who walked with God

JOHN Fletcher (1729-1785) was a modern Nicodemus. Not only was he moral and upright in character, he was religious in every fibre of his nature. Born in Switzerland in 1729, his first religious impressions came to him at the age of seven. He inherited a natural refinement and culture which might easily be mistaken for spirituality.

Unacquainted with the Gospel of grace, he hoped by doing much and living very religiously to be acceptable to God. During his student days in Geneva, he had written on religious subjects and yet he did not know saving faith and was astonished when awakened to discover how blind he was.

It was after he travelled to England, and there met the Methodists, that John Fletcher was converted. His biographer says of his conversion: "His conversion was not imaginary but real. It not only influenced his sentiments, but also extended to his conduct. He had found a Saviour, Whom he determined to follow as a Guide; and so unalterable was this determination that from the

very hour in which it was formed, it is not known that he ever cast a wistful look behind him. A cloud of witnesses are ready to testify that from his earliest acquaintance with the truths of the Gospel, he continued to walk worthy of his high vocation, 'growing in grace,' and 'adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.'"

"John Fletcher," says his biographer, "gave himself up to study, meditation and prayer, walking closely with God. Indeed, his whole life was now a life of prayer; and so intensely was his mind upon God, that he sometimes said, 'I would not move from my seat without lifting up my heart to God.' His first salute was, 'Do I meet you praying?' If ever the misconduct of an absent person was mentioned, his usual reply was, 'Let us pray for him.'"

Quotations from his letters and diary at this period of his ministry are most helpful:

"I thank God that I troubled myself with no temporal things; my only fear is that of having too much, rather than too little, of the things received for life.

I am weary of abundance. I could wish to be poor with my Saviour."

"Let us plunge ourselves into the ocean of purity. Let us try to fathom the depths of Divine mercy; and, convinced of the impossibility of such an attempt, let us lose ourselves in them. Let us be comprehended by God, if we cannot comprehend Him. Let us be supremely happy in God. Let the intenseness of happiness border on misery, because we can make Him no return.

"I charge you before the Lord Jesus Christ, who giveth life and more abundant life – I entreat you by all the actings of faith, the exertions of hope, the flames of love you ever felt, sink to greater depths of self-abasing repentance, and rise to greater heights of Christ-exalting joy."

His first and only pastorate was at Madeley, England. Here commenced one of the most remarkable ministries of all time, the results of which eternity alone will reveal.

"In this beautiful place the Sabbath was openly profaned, and the most holy things contemptuously trampled underfoot; even the restraints of decency were violently broken through and the external form of religion held up as a subject of ridicule. Such was the place where Mr Fletcher was called to stand forth as a preacher of righteousness, and in which he appeared for 25 years as a burning and shining light.

Dispensing the Word of Life

"He set his face like a flint against all who might oppose the truth and grace of God. As a steward of the manifold grace of God, he faithfully dispensed the Word of Life according as every man had need: instructing the ignorant, reasoning with gainsayers, exhorting the immoral, and rebuking the obstinate. Instant, in season and out of season, he diligently performed the work of an evangelist, and lost no opportunity of declaring the truths of the Gospel. As often as a small congregation could be collected, which was usually every evening, he joyfully proclaimed to them the Gospel, whether in the place set apart for public worship, in a home, or in the open air.

"Like a vigilant pastor, he daily acquainted himself with the wants and

dispositions of his people, anxiously watching over their households, and diligently teaching them from family to family. Esteeming no man too mean, too ignorant, or too profane to merit his affectionate attention, he condescended to the lowest and most unworthy of his flock, cheerfully becoming the servant of all, that he 'might gain the more.'

"In some of these holy visits, the earnest and constraining manner in which he has pleaded the cause of piety has melted down a whole family at once; the old and young have mingled their tears together, and solemnly determined to turn right humbly to their God.

"There were, indeed, several families in his populous parish, to which he had no access, whose members, loving darkness rather than light, agreed to deny him admission, lest their deeds should be reprov'd. In some cases, where his zeal for the salvation of individuals could not possibly be manifested by persuasion and entreaty, it was effectually discovered by supplication and prayer; nor did he ever pass the door of an opposing family without breathing out an earnest desire that the door of mercy might never be barred against their approaches.

"With respect to his attendance upon the sick, he was exemplary and indefatigable. 'It was a work,' says Mr Wesley, 'for which he was always ready.' If he heard the knocker in the coldest winter night, his window was thrown open in a moment. And when he understood either that someone was hurt in a pit, or that a neighbour was likely to die, no consideration was ever had of the darkness of the night, or of the severity of the weather; but this answer was always given – 'I will attend you immediately.'"

A preacher of righteousness and mercy

John Fletcher was pre-eminently a preacher of righteousness, but also of mercy. Yet in spite of his zeal, he was tempted to leave because he saw so little fruit and was in doubt more than once thinking he had mistaken the leading of God and was out of His will. But while the first year passed with small congregations and much discouragement, the second found him

preaching in a building so filled that many were compelled to stand in the church yard unable to get in.

John Fletcher's letters at this time reveal his heart experiences, and the following excerpts are worthy of study:

"Your prayers will not avail much unless you deny yourself and take up every cross which the Lord suffers men, devils, or your own heart to lay upon you. In the name of Jesus, and in the power of His might, break through all; and you will find more and more that Jesus is the Light of the world, and that he who follows Him 'shall not walk in darkness.'

"Your dullness in private prayer arises from the want of familiar friendship with Jesus. To obviate it, go to your closet as if you were going to meet the dearest friend you ever had; cast yourself immediately at His feet, bemoan your coldness before Him, extol His love to you, till your heart break with a desire to love Him, yea, till it actually melts with His love."

It was at this time that the Countess of Huntingdon founded a seminary in Wales for the education of young men for the ministry. After surveying the field carefully, the Countess chose John Fletcher as the first superintendent. He accepted the position with the understanding that this new field of service would not interfere with his work at Madeley.

Thus began a new era in the ministry of God's devoted servant, and the influence he exerted upon the young men of the seminary can never be estimated. His biographer writes, "As to others, his one employment was to call, entreat, and urge them to ascend with him to the glorious Source of being and blessedness. He had leisure comparatively for nothing else.

Languages, arts, sciences, grammar, rhetoric, logic, even divinity itself, as it is called, were all laid aside when he appeared in the schoolroom among the students.

"His full heart would not suffer him to be silent; he must speak; and they were readier to hearken to this servant and minister of Jesus Christ than to attend to Virgil, Cicero, or any Latin or Greek historian, poet, or philosopher they had been engaged in reading. And they seldom hearkened long before they were

all in tears and every heart caught fire from the flame that burned in his soul.

"These seasons generally terminated in this: Being convinced that to be 'filled with the Holy Ghost' was a better qualification for the ministry of the Gospel than any classical learning (although that too, be useful in its place), after speaking awhile in the schoolroom, he used to frequently say, 'As many of you as are thirsty for this fullness of the Spirit, follow me into my room.' On this, many of us have instantly followed him, and there continued for two or three hours, wrestling like Jacob, praying one after another till we could bear to kneel no longer. This was not done once or twice, but many times."

The furnace of affliction

Some of the most spiritual messages that fell from the lips of John Fletcher are those associated with his terrible illness, for he was a victim of tuberculosis. God saw fit to put His servant through the furnace of affliction so that he was tried to the utmost. Excerpts from his letters at this time are most instructive:

"I see life so short," he writes, "and that time passes away with such rapidity that I should be very glad to spend it in solemn prayer; but it is necessary that a man should have some exterior occupation. The chief thing is to employ ourselves profitably.

"My throat is not formed for the labours of preaching; when I have preached three or four times together, it inflames. Thus I am obliged to employ my time in writing a little. O that I may be enabled to do it to the glory of God!

"I begged the Lord to guide me by His counsel and make me willing to go anywhere or nowhere, to be anything or nothing."

"O how life goes! I walked, now I gallop into eternity. The bowl of life goes rapidly down the steep hill of time. Let us be wise. Let us trim our lamps, and continue to give ourselves to Him that bought us, till we can do it without reserve."

"What are your heart, your pen, your tongue, doing? Are they receiving, sealing, spreading the truth everywhere within your sphere?"

"Beware, my friend, of the world; let

Continued overleaf...

John Fletcher

Continued...

not its cares nor the deceitfulness of its riches keep or draw you from Jesus. Time flies. Years of plenty and scarcity, or peace and of war, disappear before the eternity to which we are hastening. May we see now the winged dispatch of time as we shall see it in a dying hour; and by coming to and abiding in Christ, our fortress and City of Refuge, may we be enabled to bid defiance to our 'last enemy.' Christ has fully overcome him, and by the victory of the Head, 'the living members' cannot but be fully victorious."

One foot in heaven

One who visited Fletcher during his illness commented, "I went to see a man who had one foot in the grave; but I found a man who had one foot in heaven."

His letter to his parishioners at this time is one of the most precious documents recorded by his biographers. Portions of it read as follows:

"Tottering as I stand on the brink of the grave, some of you who seem far from it may drop into it before me. Let us then all awake out of sleep; and let us all prepare for our approaching change, and give ourselves no rest till we have got gospel ground to hope that our great change will be a happy one. In order to do this, I beseech you, harden not your hearts.

"Let the long-suffering of God toward us... lead us all to repentance. Dismiss your sins, and embrace Jesus Christ, who bled for you in Gethsemane, hung for you on the Cross, and now pleads for you on His mediatorial throne. By all that is near and dear to you, as men and as Christians, meet me not, on the great Day, in your sins, enemies of Christ by unbelief, and to God by wicked works.

"Meet me in the garment of repentance, in the robe of Christ's merits, and in the white linen, which is the holiness of the godly – that 'holiness without which no man shall see God.' Let the time past suffice, in which some of you have lived in sin. By repentance

put off the old man and his works; by faith put on the Lord Jesus and His righteousness. Let all wickedness be gone, forever gone, and begin a new life, a life of new devotion to God, and of increasing love to your neighbour.

Our Sabbath eternity

"What glory! The Lord shall be our sun and our crown; and we shall be jewels in each other's crown – I in yours, and you in mine. Forever we shall be with the Lord, and with one another. We shall all live in God's heavenly church, the Heaven of heavens. All our days will be a Sabbath, and our Sabbath eternity.

"Some of you have supposed that I made more ado about eternity and your precious souls than they are worth; but how great was your mistake! Alas! It is my grief and shame that I have not been in both public and private, a thousand times more earnest and importunate with you about your spiritual concerns.

"The Lord is gracious to me; does not suffer the enemy to disturb my peace; and gives me, in prospect, the victory over death. Thanks be to God who giveth us this great victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Absolute resignation to the Divine will baffle a thousand temptations, and confidence in our Saviour carries us sweetly through a thousand trials."

After much prayer and counsel, Fletcher decided that a visit to his native air was imperative, and ill though he was, he undertook a journey to Switzerland in the hope of improving his physical condition. The following excerpts from his letter during his absence to his parishioners in Madeley are worthy of special notice:

"Have every day lower thoughts of yourselves, higher thoughts of Christ, kinder thoughts of others, higher thoughts of your brethren, and more hopeful thoughts of all around you. Be burning and shining lights wherever you are. Set the fire of Divine love to the hellish stubble of sin. Be valiant for the truth. Be champions for love. Be sons of thunder against sin, and sons of consolation toward humbled sinners. Let your heavenly-mindedness and your brotherly kindness be known to all men, so that all who see you may wonder and say 'See how these people love one another!'

"You have need of patience as well as of faith and power. You must learn to suffer as well as to do the will of God. Do not, then, think it strange to pass through fiery trials; they are excellent for the proving, purifying, and strengthening of your faith."

During the major portion of his ministry, John Fletcher laboured alone. Years before he had met a Christian woman, Mary Bosanquet, to whom he was greatly attracted; but on account of her wealth, he made no attempt to win her. She likewise kept him constantly in mind during the many years that she carried on a work that proved in itself to be a blessing to multitudes.

The day came when she was exiled from her own home on account of her affiliation with the Lord's people, and was stripped of everything she possessed. With the barrier of wealth removed that had kept them apart, they were united in marriage in November of 1781.

Only four years later in August 1785, Mr Fletcher returned home from a long day of work saying, "I have taken cold." On Friday and Saturday, he became worse and was led to pray much. In spite of a rising temperature, he insisted on preaching as usual on Sunday.

As he preached, he grew stronger

It was difficult for him to stand and every eye was riveted upon him. But as he began to preach, he grew stronger. His old-time freedom and energy returned. He was lifted above his surroundings and his message moved the congregation. He then presided at the Lord's Table during which his weakness returned. With his dying hands, he distributed the love tokens of his Lord. At the close, he fainted and he was taken to his home.

During the next week, Fletcher and his wife communed together. God gave him such manifestations of His love that Fletcher almost shouted aloud the praises of his Redeemer: "God is love! Love! Love! O for that gust of praise!" By Saturday evening his strength and breath had weakened. From then on, he peacefully rested in God, until on Sunday, August 14, his soul entered into the joy of his Lord. He was 55 years of age. ☞

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE BRETHREN

by A. W. Tozer

ONE thing that instantly strikes the intelligent reader of the New Testament is the communal nature of the Christian faith. The social pronouns – we, they, us, them – are found everywhere. God's ideal is a fellowship of faith, a Christian community. He never intended that salvation should be received and enjoyed by the individual apart from the larger company of believers.

It is true that for each one there must be a personal encounter with God, and often that encounter takes place in the loneliness and silence of retirement. In that sacred moment there must be only God and the individual soul. The mysterious operation of God in regenerating grace and His further work of the Spirit's anointing are transactions so highly personal that no third party can know or understand what is taking place.

There are other experiences deep and wholly inward that cannot be shared with any other: Jacob at Bethel and Peniel, Moses at the burning bush, Christ in the garden, John in the Isle of Patmos are Bible examples, and Christian biography will reveal many more.

A community of believers must be composed of persons who have each one met God in individual experience. No matter how large the family, each child must be born individually. Even twins or triplets are born one at a time. So it is in the local church. Each member must be born of the Spirit individually

It will not escape the discerning reader that while each child is born separate from the rest it is born into a family, and after that must live in the fellowship of the rest of the household. And the man who comes to Christ in the loneliness of personal repentance and faith is also born into a family.

The church is called the household of



God, and it is the ideal place to rear young Christians. Just as a child will not grow up to be a normal adult if forced to live alone, so the Christian who withdraws from the fellowship of other Christians will suffer great soul injury as a result. Such a one can never hope to develop normally. He'll get too much of himself and not enough of other people; and that is not good.

Where we belong

God has so created us that we need each other. We may and should go into our closet and pray to our heavenly Father in secret, but when the prayer is ended, we should go back to our people. That is where we belong.

To live within the religious family does not mean that we must approve everything that is done there. The prophets of Israel were often compelled to rebuke and warn their people, but they never left the bosom of Judaism. Even Christ went each Sabbath day and worshiped with the rest.

The reformers and revivalists of post-Biblical times invariably lived close to the people. The loneliest and severest of them had their company of like-minded souls in which they found the help and consolation their grieving hearts required. Their example does not have

the authority of revealed truth, but it does provide a rule we do well to follow.

No one is wise enough to live alone, nor good enough nor strong enough. God has made us to a large degree dependent upon each other. From our brethren we can learn how to do things and sometimes also we can learn how not to do them. The best of singers must have a coach if he would avoid having his faults become chronic.

The preacher who hears only himself preach will soon accept even his worst idiosyncrasies as marks of excellence. We need to listen to others that we may learn what to correct in ourselves. This is true also of things moral and spiritual within the Christian family circle. A weak and faulty Christian, without his knowing it, can turn us from his way of life, and every holy and fruitful saint within our circle of fellowship becomes a goad to spur us onward toward a more perfect life.

Next to God Himself, we need each other most.

We are His sheep and it is our nature to live with the flock. And too, it might be well to remember that should we for a moment lose sight of the Shepherd we only have to go where His flock is to find Him again. The Shepherd always stays with His flock. ☞



The power of God's Word in overcoming the adversary

by Mark I. Bubeck

THE sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. In keeping with John 1:1, the Lord Jesus is often spoken of as "the living Word," just as the Bible is the written Word. We have to be careful, however, not to deify the written Word to the point that we worship it. We must worship not the Bible, but the God of the Bible. Yet, because it is the very Word of God and will never pass away, the Bible carries many of the attributes of God Himself.

It is the eternal Word just as God Himself is eternal. As God is omnipotent, so does His Word have all power to defeat Satan and to accomplish God's will. As God is immutable, so the Word of God will never change. As our Lord is omnipresent, so His Word is always there and ready to be used in every situation. As God is holy, so His Word is holy.

The writer to the Hebrews says: "The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4:12)."

The power to penetrate your life

The sword of the Word has the power to penetrate one's life. It is meant to do corrective surgery within the soul, spirit, thoughts, and attitudes of the believer. That is perhaps the secret of its power against Satan. As the believer uses it, the Word can penetrate, cleanse, and change the believer's life and in so doing, cut away Satan's grip upon that life.

Nothing is quite as important in spiritual warfare as getting the Word of God into the mind and heart of the believer. That one thing will accomplish

more in setting a person free from Satan's oppression and affliction than any other method I know.

A Christian brother who had come under severe oppression from the enemy was for years unable to work or to attend church. He withdrew from life and duty. Fear, depression, and torment seemed to rule his life.

Then victory began to come as he started memorising large portions of God's Word. Daily he meditated on Scripture portions and repeated their meaning. It was amazing to see the change that simple procedure effected in his life. Anyone who is serious about spiritual warfare must memorise the Word and meditate upon it daily, even hourly.

There is no substitute for persistent, steady, consistent application of God's Word against Satan. The Lord Jesus Christ used that approach in His dramatic encounter with Satan in the wilderness, recorded in Luke 4:1-3.

It is written...

He had fasted for 40 days. At the end of that time Jesus was hungry, and food was many miles away. Satan tempted our Lord, saying: "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread (Matthew 4:3)." In reply, Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone (Luke 4:4).'"

Next Satan tried to tempt the Lord Jesus to take a shortcut to the glory of His coming kingdom by worshiping him. Once again Christ quoted the Word: "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only (Luke 4:8).'"

The final temptation came at the highest point of the Temple in Jerusalem, where Satan tried to get Jesus to "throw Yourself down from here." That time, Satan himself quoted the Scriptures, from Psalm 91:11&12.

Once again the Lord Jesus Christ persistently used the weapon of the Word, quoting Deuteronomy 6:16, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test (Luke 4:12).'" At that point, the devil left Jesus "until an opportune time (Luke 4:13)." He was defeated by the Saviour's persistent use of the "sword" but was determined to try again.

The servant of Christ will find Satan using the same pattern of attack against him. And Satan will leave only as the Word of God is persistently applied against him.

Know the Word

One of the most obvious requirements for using the "sword" is to *know the Word of God*. It was the accepted practice for devout Jewish boys of our Lord's era to memorise the first five books of the Old Testament. For most of us, that would seem an impossible task, yet there are people living today who have committed the entire New Testament to memory. Others know large portions of both Testaments. It seems obvious that the Lord Jesus Christ's ability to quickly quote from the book of Deuteronomy was a key to Satan's defeat.

Scripture memorisation is one of the most urgently needed disciplines of the Christian home and the Christian church. If we are not equipping ourselves for battle by memorising the Word, our best weapon will be just out of our reach when we most need it. Satan is waiting to find "an opportune time" in each of our lives. That opportune time will arise when we have no Bible nearby, and our weapon will be out of reach if we do not have it memorised.

There are many ways to memorise. Some can memorise large sections of the Word by simply reading them many times. For many years, when calling on hospital patients, I read favourite passages of the Word that spoke of the Lord's comfort. One day, having left my Bible in the car, I discovered to my surprise that I could quote those portions almost perfectly.

Others find it helpful to write out verses or paragraphs on cards to carry with them, then work on memorising them in spare moments. It is helpful to work with another person when memorising, so you can check on each other. Most people work more effectively under the principle of accountability.

It is equally important that you correctly understand the Word of God. One who memorises the Word must also be one who "correctly handles the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15)." When Satan quoted the Scriptures to Jesus during His temptation, he misinterpreted them. That is one of Satan's most clever tricks. He wants us to misunderstand the Word or misuse it. Some of the most effective human instruments Satan has are people who use the Bible effusively, but incorrectly.

When memorising the Word of God, it is effective to express in your own words what the text is saying. If you have any doubt about the meaning, use a trustworthy Bible commentary to arrive at a correct understanding.

Satan may use a wrong understanding of a passage of Scripture to paralyse a Christian's effectiveness. I one day had a call from a Christian lady who was in severe distress. She was the wife of a prominent physician in a distant city and very active in a Bible-preaching church.

She had got into a great deal of difficulty over two passages of Scripture in the book of Hebrews (6:4-6; 10:26-31). Satan kept tormenting her into believing that she had "fallen away" and that she had lost her salvation and could not be saved again. In trying to help, I asked her if she had ever prayed over those passages, repeatedly read them, and sought to understand what they really said. "Oh, no," was her reply. "They always frighten me too much, and I try not to read them."

Her response was typical of how Satan tries to misuse the Word of God. By tormenting her, the enemy was able to keep her from mastering the Word. I urged her to make an exhaustive study of those passages. Admittedly, they are some of the most difficult texts to understand, and I assured her that she would find good Bible scholars differing in their approach to those texts. Yet the Word is the truth of God, and God wants us to know it.

Rooted and grounded in truth

We must know the Scripture and insist that the enemy acknowledge our stand. We can only do this effectively as we build our

lives upon God's Word, "rooted and grounded" in the truth. We cannot build effective warfare upon anything else.

Feelings will not do. Feelings are as changeable as the wind. Our own discipline and dedication will not do. One day we are up, and another day we are down. Only the Word of God effectively dispatches the enemy.

Satan will not easily back off from you even when you use the Word against him. He will test you and try to get you to doubt the truth of the Word. He will challenge you. It is always important to establish your authority over him because of your union with Christ.

Christ has all authority

The enemy may deny that Christ has authority over him. But if you know the Word and quote the Word, establishing Christ's authority, you can always force him to admit that Christ has authority over all principalities and powers (Ephesians 1:19-22; Philippians 2:9-11).

We must not fail to recognise that behind "the sword of the Spirit" is a Person, the Holy Spirit. He is the one who makes our sword effective in battle.

Peter's experience in the garden when men came to take Jesus is an example of a believer's swinging the wrong sword (John 18:10). He used the wrong sword and was trusting in the wrong strength to be effective in battle. The only result was that Malchus lost an ear.

If our Lord had not been there to heal the ear immediately, not only would Malchus have suffered injury, but the entire company of disciples could have been arrested, perhaps imprisoned, or even crucified with Jesus. Our Lord often has to rescue us when we go about swinging the wrong sword in spiritual battle.

Later that same man, Peter swung the sword of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Instead of injuring one man's ear, he captured and spiritually healed 3 000 "ears." No less than 3 000 people responded to the Word of salvation and were baptised as believers.

We cannot effectively use the Word of God in warfare unless the Holy Spirit is controlling us. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:22&23)." We cannot fight spiritual

battles in a fleshly way.

How often we get into trouble when we resort to a method other than that "of the Spirit." Satan moves in on such situations even when we feel we are right and the other person is wrong. He indeed may be very wrong, but we can never do good things in a fleshly way.

We must also remember not to resist the Holy Spirit in one area of life while trying to use the "sword of the Spirit" in another. Several years ago, a woman who was under severe assault from the powers of darkness came to me for counselling. I used all the methods of warfare I knew but was still not very successful.

After several weeks of counselling, I could see no improvement. She was memorising the Word, practicing aggressive resistance of the enemy, praying doctrinally-oriented prayers, but still seemed to be losing the battle. I finally concluded something was seriously wrong.

In kindness I asked her if she was resisting the Holy Spirit in some area. She hung her head and finally told me she had a smoking problem. She did not smoke heavily, but she was aware that it was a habit she would not submit to the Holy Spirit. We dealt with that, and immediate improvement began. The intensity of the battle subsided, and the last I knew, she was walking tall in victory.


It is the Holy Spirit who applies the power of the "sword" against our foe. If we are grieving or quenching His work in our lives in any area, Satan will take advantage of that opening.

All spiritual victory is essentially bound to the Word of God. Satan retreats as the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit, is used against him.

A prayer

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I lay hold of the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. I embrace its inerrant message of truth and power. I humbly ask the Holy Spirit to guide me into true understanding of the message of the Word. Grant to me the discipline and dedication to memorise the Word and to saturate my mind with its truth and power.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, grant to me the wisdom to always apply the Word against the enemy. May I use the Word to defeat Satan and to advance the cause of Christ into that very realm Satan claims. Amen. ☩



Full salvation ...our high privilege

by Andrew Murray (1828-1917)

“And the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours (Luke 15:31).’”

Some time ago I was told by Mr Moody that the best thing that he had heard at Keswick two years ago was this verse – given by some minister as a closing or parting text, and Mr Moody said to himself, “Why did I not see that before?”

We may talk and write a great deal about the father’s love to the prodigal, but when we think of the way he treated the elder brother, it brings to our hearts a truer sense of the wonderful love of the father; therefore, I want to speak on this verse.

First, the high privilege of God’s children. Second, the low experience of many of them. Third, the cause of this great discrepancy. Fourth, the way of restoration, or how to get full salvation.

First, then, the elder son, being ever with his father, had, if he liked, the privilege of two things: unceasing fellowship and unlimited partnership. But he was worse than the prodigal, for, although always at home, yet he had never known, nor enjoyed, nor understood the privileges that were his. All this fullness of fellowship had been waiting for and offered to him, but not received. While the prodigal was away from home in the far country, his elder brother was far from the enjoyment of home, while he was at home.

An earthly father loves his child, and delights to make his child happy. “God is love (1 John 4:8),” and He delights to pour out His own nature to His people. So many people talk about God hiding His face; but there are only two things that ever caused God to do so – sin or

make merry with his friends (Luke 15:29).

The father, in the tenderness of his love, answers him, “Son, you were always in my house; you had only to ask and you would have got all you desired and required.” And that is what our Father says to all His children.

But you are saying, “I am so weak, I cannot conquer my sins, I can’t manage to keep right, I can’t do this and the other thing.”

No, but God can; and all the time He is saying to you: “All I have is yours; for in Christ I have given it to you. All the Spirit’s power and wisdom, all the riches of Christ, all the love of the Father; there is nothing that I have that is not yours; I as God am God, that I may love, keep, and bless you.”

Thus God speaks, but it seems all a dream to some. Why are you so poor? God’s Word is sure, and does He not promise all this? See in John, chapters 14-16, how He tells us that we may have wonderful answers to prayer if we come in Jesus’ name and abide in Him. Do we really believe that it is possible for a Christian to live such a life?

Now consider our second point: The Low Experience of many of God’s dear children. What is it? Just living in poverty and starvation. The elder son, the child of a rich man, living in utter poverty! “Never had a young goat,” while all that was his father’s was his – just exactly the state of many a child of God. The way He wants us to live is in the fullest fellowship of His blessings, yet what a contrast!

Ask some if their lives are full of joy; why, they don’t even believe it is possible to be always happy and holy. “How could we get on thus in business?” they say; and they imagine that the life of fullest blessing possible to them must be one of sighing and sadness and sorrow.

I asked a dear woman at the Cape – a devoted Christian woman – how she was getting on. She answered that in her experience it was sometimes light and sometimes darkness, and argued that, as this was so in nature, the same thing held good in the kingdom of grace. So, she just gave herself up to a wretched experience.

But I don’t read in the Bible that there is to be any night or darkness in the

believer’s experience; on the contrary, I read, “your sun shall no more go down (Isaiah 60:20).” Yet there are many who actually believe that there is nothing so good for them.

As I said already, nothing can hide God from us except sin and unbelief. If you are in spiritual poverty, and there is no joy, no experience of victory over sin, temper, wandering – why is it so?

“Oh,” you say, “I’m too weak, I must fall.” But does not the Scripture say that He is “able to keep you from falling (stumbling) (Jude 24)?”

A minister once told me that, although God is able, the verse does not say He is willing to do it. God does not mock us, beloved; if He says He is “able,” then it is a proof of His willingness to do it. Do let us believe God’s Word and examine our own experience in the light of it.

Again, are you working and bearing much fruit for God, and do people, by your life, see and say, “God is with that man, keeping him humble, pure, and heavenly-minded?”

Or are they forced to confess that you are just a very ordinary Christian, easily provoked, worldly, and not heavenly minded? That is not the life God wants us to live. We have a rich Father, and as no true earthly father would like to see his child in rags, or without shoes and proper clothing, neither does our God; but He wishes to fill up our life with richest and choicest blessings.

How many Sunday school teachers there are who teach, and teach, and hope for the conversion of their scholars, but yet they can’t say God uses them to the conversion of any of them. They enjoy no close fellowship with God, no victory over sin, no power to convince the world.

To which class do you belong? The low-level, or the fully-possessed? Confess it today.

These two sons represent two classes of Christians: the prodigal – away backslidden; the elder son – out of full fellowship with God. They were alike poor, and the elder son needed as great a change as did the prodigal; he needed to repent and confess and claim his full privileges.

And so ought all low-level Christians to repent, confess, and claim full salvation. Oh, both of you, come today and say, “Father, I have sinned.”

Now, we ask, what is the cause of this terrible discrepancy? Why the great difference in the experience? Ask yourself, “What is the reason I am not enjoying this full blessing? God’s Word speaks of it, others speak of it, and I see some who are living in it.”

Oh, do ask the reason; come to God and say: “Why is it I never live the life You want me to live?”

You will find the answer in our story. The elder son had an unchildlike spirit, and entertained wrong thoughts about his father – and, if you had known the real character of your Father, your life would have been all right. You have, as it were, said, “I never got a kid to make merry; my Father is rich, but He never gives. I have prayed more than enough, but God does not answer me. I hear other people say that God fills and satisfies them, but He never does that for me.”

A dear minister told me once that such a life was not for everybody, that it was of God’s sovereignty to give this to whomsoever He pleased.

A child’s heritage

Friends, there is no doubt as to God’s sovereignty. He dispenses His gifts as He will; we are not all Pauls or Peters; places at the right and left hand of God are prepared for whomsoever He will. But this is not a matter of divine sovereignty; it is a question of child’s heritage. The Father’s love offers to give to every child in actual experience His full salvation.

Now look at an earthly father. His children are of various ages, but all have equal right to the joy of their father’s countenance. True, he gives to his son of 20 years more money than to the son of five, and he has more to speak of to the boy of 15 than to the child of three. However, as regards his love toward them, it is all the same, and in their privileges as children they are all alike.

God’s love to His dear children is all the same. Oh, do not try to throw the blame on God, but say, “I have had hard thoughts of You, O God, and I have sinned. As a father I have done for my children what I did not believe God was able and willing to do for me, and I have been lacking in childlike faith.”

Oh, do believe in the love, the willingness and power of God to give you full salvation, and a change must

surely come.

Now let us consider the way of restoration: how to get out of this poor experience. The prodigal repented and so must those children of God who have been living within sight of, but not enjoying, His promises.

Conversion is generally sudden and a long repentance is usually a long impenitence. Many in the church of Christ think it must take a long time to get into full salvation. Yes, it will take a long time if you are to do it yourself – indeed, you never will.

No, no, friend, if you come and trust God it can be done in a moment. By God’s grace give yourself up to Him. Don’t say, “What’s the use? It will do no good,” but put yourself, as you are in sin and weakness, into the bosom of your Father.

God will deliver you, and you will find that it is only one step out of the darkness into the light. Say, “Father, what a wretch I have been, in being with You and yet not believing Your love to me!”

Yes, I come today with a call to “repent” – addressed, not to the unsaved, but to those who know what it is to be pardoned. For have you not sinned in the hard thoughts you have had of God, and is there not a longing, a thirsting and hungering after something better?

Come, then, repent, and just believe that God does blot out the sin of your unbelief? Do you believe it? Oh, do not dishonour God by unbelief, but come today and confidently claim full salvation. Then trust in Him to keep you. This seems difficult to some; but there is no difficulty about it. God will shine His light upon you always, saying, “Son, you are always with Me.” And all you have to do is to dwell in and walk in that light.

There are two classes of Christians: those who enjoy full salvation, and those who do not understand about it. Well, if it is not clear to you, ask God to make it clear. Remember, it is a definite act. Just let yourself go into the arms of God; hear Him say, “All is yours.” Then you say, “Praise God, I believe, I accept, I give up myself to Him, and I believe God gives Himself now to me!”

Oh, my Father, bring me into the full enjoyment of Your full salvation. ☩



Praying in the Holy Spirit

by R. A. Torrey (1856 – 1928)

“With all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints (Ephesians 6:18).”

THE three words to which I wish to call your especial attention are these, “in the Spirit.” We find the same thought in the Epistle of Jude, verses 20 and 21, “But you, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”

In those words, “praying in the Holy Spirit,” we find one of the two greatest secrets of prevailing prayer. The other of the two greatest secrets of prevailing prayer is found in the words of our Lord Jesus in John 14:13&14, “And whatever you shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you shall ask anything in My name, that will I do.”

“Praying in the name of the Lord Jesus,” and “Praying in the Holy Spirit” are the two great secrets of prevailing prayer.

If anyone should ask me, “What is the great secret of holy living,” I would say at once, “Living in the Holy Spirit.”

If anyone should ask me, “What is the great secret of effective service for Jesus Christ,” I should reply at once, “Serving in the Holy Spirit.”

If anyone should ask me, “What is the one greatest secret of profitable Bible study?” I would reply, “Studying in the Holy Spirit.”

And if anyone should ask me what was the one great all-inclusive secret of prevailing prayer, I should reply, “Praying in the Holy Spirit.” It is the prayer that the Holy Spirit inspires that

sometimes with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Oh, that we had people in our church who knew how to pray like that. I believe the greatest need of the Church of Jesus Christ today, and the Church of Jesus Christ throughout the world, is men and women who pray in the Holy Spirit, with the intense earnestness that He gives, and He alone gives.

The second characteristic of praying in the Holy Spirit is intelligent praying, perfect wisdom in our praying, praying for things that are according to the will of God. This comes out in the next verse, Romans 8:27, “And He that searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”

The third characteristic of the praying that is really “praying in the Holy Spirit,” is complete assurance that God has heard and answered our prayer. It is the prayer that the Holy Spirit inspires that is really “the prayer of faith,” and the one who so prays knows that he is praying “according to the will of God” and has assurance without a shadow of doubt that God has heard and answered his prayer.

The fourth characteristic of praying that is really “praying in the Holy Spirit” is determination in our praying, the determination to get what we ask from God, a persistence in asking until we do get it.

This comes out clearly in Ephesians 6:18: “with all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.”

We come now to the intensely practical question and the immediately important question, “How may we pray in the Holy Spirit?” That is, how can we make sure that the Spirit of God is guiding us in our prayer, make sure that our prayers are not merely the promptings of our own selfish desires but the sure leadings of the Spirit of God within us?

The answer to this all-important question is very plainly set forth in the Word of God.

First of all, if we are to pray in the Spirit, we must surrender our wills and ourselves absolutely and unreservedly to God. This comes out in many places in Scripture.

For example, it comes out in Acts 5:32, where we read: “And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.”

Here we are plainly taught that God gives the Holy Spirit “to those who obey Him,” and to them only. And the heart of obedience is in the will, the surrender of the will and the surrender of one’s self to God.

Unless we make this absolute surrender, God cannot take control of our prayer life any more than any other part of our life.

In the second place, if we would pray in the Holy Spirit, we must scrupulously obey God in every department of our lives. Disobedience at any point of our life grieves the Holy Spirit and makes it impossible for Him to control us in our actions, and it is just as impossible for Him to take control of our prayer life as it is to take charge of any other part of our life.

Study the Word every day

In order to obey God we must study the Word of God every day of our lives to find out what the will of God is, and then whenever we find it do it every time.

If we refuse to do it at any point the Holy Spirit cannot keep control of our prayer life, and we cannot “pray in the Holy Spirit.” That comes out very clearly in our Lord Jesus’ wonderful promise to answer prayer found in John 14:13&14, “And whatever you shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you shall ask anything in My name, that will I do.”

And then Jesus went on to say – and by saying it clearly shows the connection between daily obedience and that power in prayer that comes through praying in the Holy Spirit: “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive; for it does not behold Him not, nor knows Him: you know Him; for He abides with you, and shall be in you (verse 15-17).”

In the third place, if we would pray in the Holy Spirit, we must realise and keep in mind our own utter inability to

pray aright, and our entire dependence upon the Holy Spirit, if we are to pray wisely and prevailingly. Oh, if there is any time when we need to feel our utter dependence upon the Comforter, the ever-present Friend and Helper and Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, it is when we pray.

We need to feel deeply our dependence upon Him in our living, in our daily warfare with the world, the flesh and the devil. We need to feel our dependence upon Him in our service for Christ, realising that it is “not by might nor by power” (nor any natural gifts or abilities of our own), but “by My Spirit,” that we are to accomplish anything for God in this world (Zechariah 4:6).

We need to feel our dependence upon Him in our Bible study, realising that He is the only perfect interpreter of the Word, and that He is ready to interpret the Word to us as we study. But above, all we need to feel our dependence upon Him when we pray.

We will do well if we always bear in mind the inspired words of Paul as found in Romans 8:26, “We know not how to pray as we ought...” If Paul, that mighty servant of Jesus Christ, that wonderful man of prayer, knew not how to pray as he ought, certainly we do not.

But we should also keep in mind the words that immediately follow in that same verse, and the following verse, “but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered; and He that searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”

In the fourth place, if we would pray in the Holy Spirit, we must definitely ask God to guide us by His Holy Spirit as we pray. Tell God that you do not know how to pray as you ought, and ask Him to guide you by His Spirit.

In the fifth place, if we would pray in the Holy Spirit, we must count on God’s answering our prayer to send His Holy Spirit to teach us to pray. We can unhesitatingly count on God sending Him because in the passage just read, Romans 8:26-27, He has definitely promised to do so.

In the sixth place, if we would pray in the Holy Spirit, we must keep getting filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul’s inspired exhortation in Ephesians 5:18,

“be filled with the Spirit,” or to translate more literally, “be getting filled with the Holy Spirit,” has the most intimate connection with our prayer life.

If we are filled with the Spirit we will be guided by the Spirit in our prayers as well as in everything else. A Spirit-filled man will always be a prayerful man, and his prayers will be in the Holy Spirit.

Finally, if we would pray in the Spirit, we must study the Word of God daily and earnestly. The written Word of God is the visible instrument through which the invisible Spirit of God works; so, if you would keep filled with that Spirit you must keep full of the Word. This comes out very clearly in the passage to which we have just referred, Ephesians 5:18&19, “Be filled with the Spirit; speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.”

Filled with the Word

Colossians 3:16, “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God.” We see here that Paul in Colossians attributes to being filled with the Word exactly the same thing that he attributes to being filled with the Spirit in Ephesians 5:18-19 – and these two Epistles were written at just about the same time.

We must never lose sight of the tremendously important fact that the invisible Spirit of God does His work through the visible written Word of God.

There is deepest significance in our Lord’s own words found in John 6:63, “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit, and are life.” Prevailing prayer always goes hand in hand with persistent and obedient study of the Word of God.

We must see to it that we pray not out from our own selfish desires, but under the impulse and inspiration and guidance and control of the Holy Spirit, so we pray in the wisdom and earnestness and intensity and never-wearying persistence and resistless power of prayer that He imparts.

Then our prayer will be the mightiest power on earth; for all God has, and all God is, is at the disposal of that kind of praying. 🐟



If God is so good, why does He let me hurt?

by Sue Bohlin

THIS is probably the biggest question, and the biggest obstacle to trusting God, in Christianity. It's a legitimate question, and it deserves a thoughtful answer that honours the amount of pain attached to it.

Disclosure: I am writing this while beset by the most physical pain I've experienced since post-polio syndrome started attacking my body with the "unholy trinity" of pain, weakness and fatigue. It hurts to stand, it hurts to walk. Every single step.

Why does God allow it? And my pain is *nothing* compared to the horrific suffering of millions around the world. Doesn't He care? Why doesn't He stop it – surely He can. He could stop it all with a single word. So why does He let innocent people – especially children, for heaven's sake – suffer?

We need to put evil and suffering into perspective, and that means the Really

Big Picture. Starting before the beginning of time. When all there was, was God: Father, Son and Spirit, engaged in a three-Personed "holy hug" that had no beginning and has no end. A continual celebration of love, adoration, respect, and delight in each other. At some point Father God decided to create mankind and draw us into His circle of love, adopting us as sons (Ephesians 1:4&5) and creating a Bride for His eternal Son (Revelation 19:7), a fit companion who would reign with the Lamb (Revelation 22:5).

But God knew that all of human history would unfold between the bookends of the creation of mankind and the Marriage Feast of the Lamb. The God of light and life, of love and truth, knew that all those things are found only in Him; He knew that to reject Him meant choosing darkness and death, isolation and deception.

He knew that Adam would rebel, that

His perfect creation would crash and burn in the Fall, and that everything would be infected and corrupted by sin. He knew that every human being would be born with a compulsion to reject Him, to live disconnected from Him, independent from Him – something like spiritual HIV+, ensuring a death sentence. And sure enough, the mortality rate is still 100%.

God knew all this, and He created us anyway. Because He knew the end result was worth it.

Because God is love, He created people to love, and He created people to love Him back. In order for us to choose to return His love, we needed to be free to choose NOT to love Him. God made us with the very real option to say no to Him, so that our yes would mean something.

Words with no heart

The alternative would be the equivalent to making a phone say, "Good morning, I love you." The words might be there but there is no heart and no choice behind them – they are nothing more than the result of a programming code. God wanted real and actual love, and that meant that some people He made and dearly loved, could and would, say no.

When people say no to God, they not only cut themselves off from relationship with Him, they open the door to all kinds of evil. Some of it comes from sinful human hearts; some of it comes from the demonic realm, angels who also said no to God and became devils. Evil was unleashed by Adam when he disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3) and it has been causing havoc, pain and suffering ever since.

Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that this world plagued by pain and disease, deliberate meanness and selfishness, is not God's original perfect creation. If it were, God would indeed be a horrible monster. He knew Adam would open the door to all kinds of evil and suffering, and He allowed Adam to do it anyway. Because He knew the end result was worth it.

Why does God let people suffer?

God uses suffering to cleanse us, to mature us, to burn up shallowness. He uses pain as His instrument to shape us

into the image of His Son (Romans 8:28&29). God has no magic wand that instantly transforms us from something broken and dirty (and we are far more broken and dirty than we have any idea) into something whole and beautiful. There is no divine "Bibbity-Bobbity-Boo."

Instead, the Son left heaven, wrapped Himself in human flesh, and came to earth where He lived a perfect, sinless life. Every day of His earthly life, He suffered as a human, limiting Himself to a body that would get tired, hungry, thirsty and dirty.

What the first Adam messed up, Jesus the Second Adam corrected. Where Adam disobeyed the Father, Jesus learned obedience through suffering (Hebrews 5:8). Jesus suffered throughout His incarnation simply because of His limitations as a human, then suffered an unimaginably horrible

death through crucifixion, made even worse because He absorbed all the sin of every human being who had ever lived, was living on the earth at that time, and would ever exist in the future.

He took our sin into Himself, actually becoming our sin (2 Corinthians 5:21), so that when He died, our sin died with Him. But the Father raised Him from the dead, and He is alive at His Father's right hand right now in heaven.

This means that God knows what it means to suffer. There is no pain, no suffering we can endure, that God Himself did not experience even more during Jesus' time on earth. This same suffering God promised, "Behold, I am making all things new (Revelation 21:5)." The Father knew He would send the Son to suffer, and the Son knew that's what He would leave heaven for.

He did it anyway. Because He knew

the end result was worth it.

God allows pain and suffering and evil because He has a plan, and He's working His plan. The end result is that He is redeeming and restoring all the evil, pain and suffering of this sin-sick world. He will set all things right in the end. The last chapter of the Bible makes it clear that there is a happy ending to what is NOT a fairy tale.

What started out as a Three-Personed holy hug of the Father, Son and Spirit loving each other while still remaining one God, will be a hugely enlarged circle of love that includes millions, possibly billions of people God made in His image, marked "Mine," and drew into the divine circle to love and be loved forever.

At that point I believe we will agree, as we look back on evil, pain and suffering on earth, that it was so, so worth it. 🐟

PRAYER the greatest ministry...

by E.M. Beyerle

TRULY, prayer is the greatest ministry we can render. We make this assertion after much prayerful meditation. It is the greatest ministry because:

First: It reaches farthest afield. Work is more or less local in aspect. Money is limited both in its possession and its distribution. Prayer alone can be universal.

Second: Its rewards are sure in eternity, if offered for the glory of God alone, since it is, for the most part, at least, a secret ministry. Much work and many gifts are rewarded here and now, but not so intercessory prayer. There is not much praise or many "Thank-yous" rendered to the quiet, unassuming man or woman who spends much time with God.

Third: It is the rarest of all ministries, and therefore the most precious. We are not apt to regard prayer as great because it is not spectacular. It is a closet service, so to speak. To many it is both irksome and monotonous.

Fourth: It loosens God's hands. Commenting upon the gracious visitation of God during the Welsh revival, R.B. Jones says, "God seems to have so ordained that most, if not indeed all, of His activities in the moral and spiritual realms should be the response of His heart and power to the prayers of His people." John Wesley made a similar striking statement that "God does nothing excepting in answer to the prayers of His people." If we, as His children, realised the full significance of these above assertions, how often we would be found upon our knees instead of upon our feet hurrying hither and yon on business or pleasure-bent, which is neither necessary nor profitable.

Fifth: It is a ministry associated with Christ Himself in the Holy of Holies in heaven itself. There in the "secret place of the Most High" is to be found fellowship with Him, the Son of

God, as He intercedes for His people and imparts His tender yearning over a lost world.

Sixth: It is a "service of gift" from the Lord, for we read, "I have given your priest's office unto you as a service of gift (Numbers 18:7)..." If the Lord were to give us a golden key that would unlock all the treasure stores of earth how eagerly we would grasp it and how earnestly we would use it! Well, that is just what He has done. He has given us a key which will unlock the vaults of heaven's glory, and power, and riches of grace. Why is it that we esteem it so lightly and apply it so rarely?

If prayer is the greatest ministry, it is also the costliest service. Why do we say this? For answer, turn to Psalm 66:18: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." We are not to cease praying at every accusation of the enemy, but we are to walk softly lest we fail to measure up to the requirements. Two other passages in the Psalms throw light upon the question of the iniquity which will bar the would-be intercessor from the audience chamber of God.

Psalm 24:3&4 gives us a clear description of the one who can "ascend into the hill of the Lord," or "who shall stand in His holy place."

Psalm 15 goes into detail about the same matter. It will do us well to read them over carefully and often as we seek to enter into His presence to minister as priests for a sinning and lost world, a compromising and apostate Christendom, a suffering and sorrowing Israel, and a rightful but needy heir of the kingdom.

"Call unto Me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not (Jeremiah 33:3)." 🐟



The tests of obedience

by J. Gregory Mantle

GOD always has a number of His children under examination. Some of them pass with honours, but a few are turned back to learn their lessons over again. Many fail in this critical time in their spiritual history because they do not understand the divine purpose. They cry out with Job, “He has fenced up my way that I cannot pass, and He has set darkness in my paths (Job 19:8).”

They do not perceive that the position they have taken over and over again is being put to the test.

Madame Guyon said, “God will give us opportunities to try our consecration, whether it be a true one or not. No man can be wholly the Lord’s unless he is wholly consecrated to the Lord; and no man can know whether he is thus wholly consecrated except by tribulation. That is the test.

“To rejoice in God’s will, when that will imparts nothing but happiness, is easy even for the natural man. But none but the renovated man, none but the religious man, can rejoice in the divine will when it crosses his path, disappoints his expectations, and overwhelms him with sorrow. Trial, therefore, instead of

being shunned, should be welcomed as the test – and the only true test – of a true state.

“Beloved souls, there are consolations which pass away, but true and abiding consolation you will not find except in entire abandonment, and in that love which loves the Cross. He who does not welcome the Cross does not welcome God.”

God takes us at our word...

How many have repeatedly and deliberately said to God, “I put myself wholly into Your hands: put me to what You will; rank me with whom You will; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for You, or laid aside for You; exalted for You, or trodden under foot for You; let me be full, let me be empty; let me have all things, let me have nothing; I freely and heartily resign all to Your pleasure and disposal.”

In due time God takes us at our word. He has had us in His school for months, or it may be for years, and has given us great freedom and joy. He has set our feet in a “large place” of blessing, when suddenly, perhaps, suffering of the severest character takes the place of the

delightful experiences through which we have been passing. The vessel, which has been sailing under fair and sunny skies, is struck by a hurricane, and her staunchness is tested to the uttermost.

Among the many comforting words in such a season, that of the Apostle James is most sustaining: “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing (James. 1:2-4).”

Note the condition, surrounded by diverse temptations or manifold trials. Out of surroundings which have been conducive to peace, comfort, and outward prosperity, we suddenly fall into the midst of a marauding band of trials.

We are tempted to be terrified by our adversaries, to despise the chastening of the Lord, to grow weary of His correction, and to faint in the day of adversity. To prevent our yielding to either of these temptations, God has clearly revealed His purpose, and has distinctly told us what our attitude should be. If ever we needed to listen for the voice of Infinite Love it is now.

Listen, He speaks, “...Fear not: for I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you: when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour (Isaiah 43:1-3)...”

Our safety is only in stillness of the soul. If we are afraid and exchange the principle of faith for that of fear, or if we are rebellious and restless we shall be hurt by the flames, and anguish and disappointment will be the result.

A proof of His love

Moreover, God will be disappointed in us if we break down. Testing is a proof of His love and confidence, and who can tell what pleasure our steadfastness and stillness give to Him? If He allowed us to go without testing it would be no complement to our spiritual experience.

Much trial and suffering mean, therefore, that God has confidence in us; that He believes we are strong enough to endure; that we shall be true to Him even when He has left us without any outward evidence of His care, and at the seeming mercies of our adversaries. If He increases the trials instead of diminishing them, it is an expression of confidence in us up to the present, and a further proof that He is looking to us to glorify Him in the yet hotter fires through which He is calling us to pass.

Let us not be afraid. The subtleties of the self-life will be exposed and the hateful thing destroyed. We shall be delivered from the outward and the transitory, and drawn into far closer fellowship with God Himself.

Think when you use the sharp blade of your penknife that its keenness has only been produced by a terribly severe process. The best steel is subjected to the alternates of extreme heat and extreme cold. That little blade was heated and hammered, then heated again, and then plunged into the coldest water to give its right shape and temper. It would not be in your hand had it broken down under this tempering process. If, when it was put upon the grindstone, any flaw had appeared, even though previously it

had seemed a perfect blade, it would have been rejected as useless, and thrown aside.

So, God, longing for our equipment for the highest service, tests us in a thousand ways. All things – there is no exception whatever – are working together for the purification, the refining, the testing, and the approval of human character. Now we are cast into the furnace of affliction, heated seven times hotter than it is normally heated; now we are plunged into the cold waters of bereavement; and now we are ground between the upper and nether stones of adversity and disaster.

How shall we come forth? That depends entirely on the way we endure. If we simply say, “As God will, and in the hottest fire stand still,” He will give us a place of honour among His servants, and crown us with immortal glory.

“...He knows the way that I take: when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold (Job 23:10).” The hay and the stubble fear the fire, but the gold challenges the flame to do its worst. Therefore –

*Let thy gold be cast in the furnace,
Thy red gold, precious and bright;
Do not fear the angry fire
With its caverns of burning light;
And thy gold shall return more precious,
Free from every spot and stain;
For gold must be tried by the fire,
And the heart must be tried by pain.*

The Apostle James tells us what the purpose of the testing is, “that [we] may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing (1:4).” A perfect machine fulfils the object for which it is made, and a perfect Christian is one of such a character that he fulfils the object for which he has been made a Christian.

“Entire, wanting nothing,” conveys the idea of being properly adjusted and arranged, so that our avenues of temptation are properly guarded. God would have our moral nature so adjusted that we may have everything in its place.

Shall we shrink from an experience, however painful, which accomplishes an end like this? That which makes us mature in Christ Jesus, wanting nothing that a Christian man should possess and

enjoy, is worth any suffering, however severe or protracted. Though, “now for a season, if need be, you are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire” (1 Peter 1:6-7),” let us, as James exhorts us, “count it all joy.”

God desires not our comprehension in such times, but our confidence. He is disciplining us for eternal companionship with Himself, and because “it does not yet appear what we shall be (1 John 3:2),” let us joyfully stand in the midst of the fiery furnace, knowing that we shall lose nothing in the fire but our bonds, and that ever in the midst thereof will be One who is the Son of God.

We shall cease to wonder at the pains God takes to purify and perfect human character, when we remember that it is the only work of His hands which, so far as we are concerned, will last forever. Everything else that we possess and pursue is fading and perishing already.

Moral character, built up under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, partakes of God’s immortality, because it is nothing less than the divine nature incarnate, incorporate and made manifest in man.

He spares no cost to produce it

So precious is its acquisition to God that He spares no cost to produce it. He puts us just where His purpose can best be accomplished. We sometimes complain as to the nature of our environment, but when God put us where we are He had the choice of the whole world open to Him; and could His purpose have been better achieved in other surroundings, He would have placed us there.

Let us work out our salvation in thankful cooperation with Him. The diamond can offer no resistance to the cutter, nor can the clay offer intelligent response to the potter. We can both resist and respond.

Thankfully recognising what Butler calls “the providential disposition of things,” let us cease from resisting and, with our whole heart, give ourselves to responding. ☩



A covenant of consecration

by James Gilchrist Lawson

CHRISTMAS Evans, often called “The John Bunyan of Wales,” after years of preaching began to feel an intense need and longing for a closer fellowship with God. How he sought for and obtained this richer, fuller Christian experience which set his soul on fire with divine unction, is given thus in his own words:

“I was weary of a cold heart towards Christ, and His atonement, and the work of His Spirit – of a cold heart in the pulpit, in secret prayer and in study. I felt it my duty to pray, though my heart was hard enough and my spirit worldly. After I had commenced praying in the name of Jesus, I soon felt as if the shackles were falling off, and as if the mountains of snow and ice were melting within me.

“This engendered confidence in my mind for the promise of the Holy Spirit. I felt my whole being relieved of some great bondage, and as if it were rising up from the grave of a severe winter. My tears flowed copiously, and I was constrained to cry aloud and pray for the gracious visits of God, for the joy of His salvation, and that He would visit again the churches that were under my care.

“Thus I gave myself up wholly to Christ, body and soul, talents and labours – all my life – every day, and every hour that remained to me, and all my cares I entrusted into the hands of Christ.

“In the first service I held after this, I felt as if I had been removed from the cold and sterile region of spiritual ice into the pleasant lands of the promises of God. When I returned home, the first thing that attracted my notice was that the Spirit was working also in the brethren in Anglesey, inducing in them a spirit of prayer, especially in two of the deacons, who were particularly persistent that God should visit us in mercy, and render the Word of His grace effectual among us in the conversion of sinners.”

A great revival spread from preacher to people all over the whole of Wales. “Powerful sermons, the breath of heaven, the weeping, the praising, the return of sinners to God” now characterised Evans’ meetings wherever he went. It was about the time of this remarkable experience of the anointing of the Holy Spirit that Christmas Evans wrote his “solemn covenant with God,” which follows:

A Solemn Covenant with God

- I give my soul and body unto You, Jesus, the true God, and everlasting life; deliver me from sin, and from eternal death, and bring me into life everlasting. Amen.
- I call the day, the sun, the earth, the trees, all, to witness that I come unto You, Redeemer of sinners, that I may

obtain rest for my soul from the thunders of guilt and the dread of eternity. Amen.

- I do, through confidence in Your power, earnestly entreat You to take the work into Your own hand, and give me a circumcised heart, that I may love You; and create in me a right spirit, that I may seek Your glory. Grant me that principle which You will own in the day of judgement, that I may not then assume pale-facedness, and find myself a hypocrite. Grant me this, for the sake of Your most precious blood. Amen.

- I entreat You, Jesus, the Son of God, in power, grant me, for the sake of Your agonising death, a covenant interest in Your blood which cleanses; in Your righteousness, which justifies; and in Your redemption, which delivers. I entreat an interest in Your blood, for Your blood’s sake, and a part in You, for Your name’s sake, which You have given among men. Amen.

- O Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, take for the sake of Your cruel death, my time, and strength, and the gifts and talents I possess; which, with a full purpose of heart, I consecrate to Your glory in the building up of Your church in the world, for You are worthy of the hearts and talents of men. Amen.

- I desire You, my great High Priest, to confirm, by Your power from Your High Court, my usefulness as a preacher, and my piety as a Christian, as two gardens near to each other; that sin may not have place in my heart to cloud my

confidence in Your righteousness, and that I may not be left to any foolish act that may occasion my gifts to wither, and I be rendered useless before my life ends. Keep Your gracious eye upon me, and watch over me, O my Lord, and my God forever! Amen.

- I give myself in a particular manner to You, O Jesus Christ the Saviour, to be preserved from the falls into which many stumble, that Your name (in Your cause) may not be blasphemed or wounded, that my peace may not be injured, and that Your people may not be grieved and that Your enemies may not be hardened. Amen.

- I come entreating You to enter into a covenant with me in my ministry. Oh, prosper me as You prospered Bunyan, Vavasor, Powell, Howell Harris, Rowlands, and Whitefield. Remove the impediments in the way of my prosperity. Work in me the things approved of God that I may attain this. Give me a heart “sick of love” to You, and to the souls of men. Grant that I may feel the power of Your Word before preaching it, as Moses felt the power of his rod before he felt the effect of it on the land and waters of Egypt. For the sake of Your precious blood, Jesus, my all in all, grant me this. Amen.

- Search me now, and lead me in the paths of judgement. May I see in this world what I really am in Your sight, that I may not find myself otherwise when the light of eternity shall dawn upon me, and I open my eyes in the brightness of immortality. Wash me in Your redeeming blood. Amen.

- Give me power to trust in You for food and raiment, and to make known my requests to You. O let Your care be over me as a covenant privilege between You and me, and not simply as a general care which You show in feeding the ravens that perish and clothing the lily that is cast into the oven – but remember me as one of Your family, and as one of Your unworthy brethren. Amen.

- Grant, O blessed Lord, that no sin may be nourished or fostered in me which may cause You to cast me off from the work of Your sanctuary, like the sons of Eli; and, for the sake of Your infinite merits, let not my days be longer than my usefulness. Let me not become, at the end of my days, like a piece of lumber in the way of the usefulness of others. Amen.

- I beseech You, my Redeemer, to present these supplications of mine before the Father; and oh, inscribe them in Your book with Your own immortal pen, while I am writing them with my mortal hand in my book on earth. According to the depths of Your merit,

and Your infinite grace, and Your compassion, and Your tenderness toward Your people, O attach Your name in Your Upper Court to these humble supplications of mine; and set Your amen to them, even as I set mine on my side of the covenant. Amen. ☩

Steps to be filled with the Spirit

by Samuel Chadwick (1860-1932)

IT IS God’s will that every believer should be filled with the Spirit, overflow in the power of the Spirit, and in all things prevail through the Spirit. What hinders? The blessing is for all, and for all now.

The conditions are simple, unalterable, and universal. God waits to fill ordinary people with extraordinary power, and to turn a baffled faith into a rapturous conquest. Now what are the steps of faith by which the blessing is appropriated?

The first step is to repent. “And Peter said to them, Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).” There is a repentance of believers as well as of sinners. When men begin to pray for the blessing of Pentecost the answer begins in conviction of sin. Things are not surrendered, indulgences retained against light, possessions held for selfish ends – these must all be surrendered to the supreme authority of Christ. For until He is exalted, crowned, glorified, there can be no Pentecost.

The second step is to ask. “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him (Luke 11:13)?” There must be definite asking for the specific gift. There must be desire that is focused into petition. “You have not,” says James, “because you ask not (James 4:2),” and there are thousands of believers who have never definitely asked for the Blessing. God waits to give, but He is a God of discretion, and waits to be asked. “I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it... For this, moreover will I be inquired of by the house of Israel; to do it for them (Ezekiel 36:36&37).”

We must be careful not to ask amiss. Nothing hinders faith so effectually as a wrong motive. “How can you believe, who receive the glory one of another, and the glory that comes from God you do not seek (John 5:44)?” James traces the failure of prayer to the same source: “You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it in your pleasures (James 4:3).” The pleasures may be lawful and laudable enough, but God will not give the glory of His Son to another, but the mission of the Spirit is to glorify the Son. If the power is sought for success in Christian service merely, it will not be given. Christ must be supreme in affection and aim.

The third step is to receive. When the consecration is complete the act of faith is quite simple. “Receive the Holy Spirit” is the all-inclusive command. “Therefore I say to you, all things whatever you pray and ask for, believe that you have received them, and you shall have them (Mark 11:24).” Take God at His Word.

The fourth step is the continuous life of obedience. Jesus Christ identifies faith with obedience, and in the Acts of the Apostles obedience is made the condition of receiving and retaining the Spirit. “And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32).” Abiding fullness depends upon obedience to the ever-widening circle of illumination. The blessing of Pentecost may be lost, and it is always lost when obedience fails. The Spirit-filled must be Spirit-ruled. Those who are greatly used of God have no monopoly of the Holy Spirit; they are mighty through God because the Spirit has a monopoly of them.

Again I say this extraordinary gift is for ordinary people. All may be filled as full and as truly as the 120 on the day of Pentecost. The conditions are the same for all.

Repent, Ask, Receive, Obey. ☩



Your own soul

by Samuel L. Brengle

I WAS once asked the question by a woman: “Cannot one take too much care of one’s own soul? I see all about me everywhere so much sorrow and suffering and injustice that I am perplexed at God’s way of ruling the world, and it seems to me as though every Christian ought to be trying to help others instead of looking out for one’s own soul.”

Here is a common perplexity. Every Christian sees around him sorrow and suffering which he cannot help – and his perplexity at the sight of the Lord’s prompting for him to take the very utmost care of his own soul lest he stumble and fall through doubt and discouragement.

By the care of his soul I do not mean that he shall coddle and pet and pity himself, nor work himself up into some pleasant feeling. But I mean that he should pray and pray and pray, and seek the presence and teaching of the Holy Spirit until his soul is filled with light and strength, that he may have unquestioning faith in the wisdom and love of God, that he may have unwearied patience in learning His will (Hebrews 6:12) – and that his love may be equal to the great need he sees all around him.

Reader, maybe you, too, are troubled by the sight of unhelped wretchedness near you. No living soul can answer to your satisfaction the questions that rise

up within you, and that Satan will suggest as you look on the misery of the world. But the blessed Comforter will satisfy your heart and your head if you have the faith and patience to wait while He teaches you “all things” and leads you “into all truth (John 16:13).”

“They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength (Isaiah 40:31).” You cannot help people if you go to them robbed of your strength through doubts and fears and perplexities. So wait on God until He strengthens your heart.

Let Him do it

Do not become impatient. Do not try beforehand to find out what God will say, nor just how He will say it. He will surely teach you, but you must let Him do it in His own way, and then you will be able to help people with all the might and wisdom of Jehovah.

You must trust His love and you must abide His time – but you must wait on Him and expect Him to teach you. If the King of England is coming to Windsor Castle, the servants do not lie around listlessly nor hunt up a lot of work to do, but every one stands in his own place and with eager expectancy. This is what I mean by waiting upon God. Of this kind of taking care of your own soul you cannot do too much, and do not let anyone drive you from it by ridicule or entreaty.

The woodman would be very foolish who thought he had so much wood to

cut that he could not take time to grid his axe. The servant would be useless who went to the city to buy things for his master, but was in such a hurry that he did not come to his master for orders and the needed money.

How much worse is he who attempts to do God’s work without God’s direction and God’s strength?

One morning, after a half-night of prayer which I led and in which I had worked very hard, I got up early to be sure of an hour with God and my Bible, and God blessed me till I wept. An officer who was with me was much moved, and then confessed: “I do not often find God in prayer – I have not time.”

People who do not find God in prayer must hinder His cause instead of helping it.

Take time. Miss breakfast if necessary, but take time to wait on God, and when God has come and blessed you, then go to the miserable ones about you and pour upon them the wealth of joy, the love and peace God has given you. But do not go until you know you are going in His power.

I once heard William Booth say in an officer’s council: “Take time to pray God’s blessing down on your own soul every day. If you do not, you will lose God. God is leaving men every day. They once had power. They walked in the glory and strength of God but they ceased to wait on Him and earnestly seek His face, and He left them. I am a busy man, but I take time to go alone with God every day and commune with Him. If I did not, He would soon leave me.”

Paul said, “Take heed therefore (1) **unto yourselves**, and (2) to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (Acts 20:28).”

And again, “Take heed (1) **unto yourself** and (2) to the doctrine... for in doing this you shall save both yourself, and those who hear you (1 Timothy 4:16).”

Paul did not mean to promote selfishness by telling us to first take heed to ourselves, but he did mean to teach that unless we do take heed to ourselves and are full of faith and hope and love in our own souls, we shall be unable to help others. 🐟