

Acts - Commentaries by L. Douglas Nicolet

The Christian Shepherd: 2001, Practical Reflections on Acts: Acts 9:15-31 (9:15-31)

15-16. "But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake."

He who declares the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10) displays sovereign grace. Saul of Tarsus is a chosen vessel of the One he so zealously persecuted (vs. 4)! The Lord does not speak of great things that Saul would accomplish, but of great things he would suffer. It is the time of conflict, suffering and labor now. The day of rest and glory is coming.

17. "And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost."

The first words recorded by the Holy Spirit between a fearful follower (see vss. 13-14) and pardoned persecutor are "brother Saul"! What a display of the infinite grace of God towards both. Divine grace gave courage to the obedient servant as it had reached down to pick up the chief of sinners.

18. "And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized."

Saul had been blind to the glory of Christ as he energetically persecuted the assembly, entering into every house (Acts 8:3) and dragging to prison the Lord's people. But on the way to Damascus he was blinded by the risen Christ of glory.

Earlier he had seen no beauty in Christ; now he sees no one save Jesus only. The result is immediate obedience—he rises, a new vision, we may say, filling his eyesight, and is immediately baptized. Oh! that we would ever walk with the Christ of glory filling our vision in this dark wilderness.

19-20. "And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God."

The newborn believer, like a newborn infant, needs food—the sincere milk of the Word—and fellowship with those of like precious faith.

The moral order of Saul's conversion is beautiful. He receives sight, is obedient to baptism, is given food, and fellowships with the people of God. Afterwards, he preaches the gospel to the lost—the truth as to the person of Christ. This is, as it were, the normal pattern of true Christian conversion.

21. "But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?"

The grace of God is beyond the understanding of man—His ways are indeed past finding out. The former destroyer has, in Christ, become a new creation. Old things having passed away, all who hear Saul know he is not the Saul who had come to persecute in Damascus.

22. "But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ."

While the new believer's spiritual strength increased, the unbelieving Jews' confusion increased. To them, void of faith and requiring a sign, Saul's preaching was a stumblingblock. But the Christ who had saved Saul of Tarsus was, and is, the cornerstone—the foundation of all blessing.

23-25. "And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: but their laying wait was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket."

Man's religious heart is ever at enmity with God (Col. 1:21), who gives testimony of the Messiah to His guilty earthly people—and in matchless grace does so for many days. But their unbelieving hearts will not have the sovereign grace of God, nor will they humble themselves and submit to His truth.

Yet, the eyes of the Lord are in every place, and thus Saul, now a disciple of Christ, is aware of their wicked plans. The once haughty pharisaical enemy of Christ must now taste what it is to be weak. He who wrote, "When I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. 12:10), learns by experience that there are times to flee in a basket at night, even as there will be other times of fighting with beasts at Ephesus. Christ in glory gives strength to do all things.

26. "And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple."

Here was further humbling for the servant of Christ. Rather than a reception of loving hospitality and welcome at Jerusalem, his former deeds of persecution against Christians bear the fruit of fear—what Saul the persecutor had sowed, Saul the believer now reaped.

27. "But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus."

How wonderful that there was a Barnabas (the "son of consolation") who in divine grace stood in the breach, commanding the seeking Saul to the fearful assembly. May we be a Barnabas today!

28. "And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem."

Before Saul began his public ministry there, he was established in public fellowship with the assembly.

29. "And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him."

Fellowship with the assembly in Jerusalem gave Saul liberty and the name of Jesus gave him authority to preach and reason with the Hellenist Jews.

30. "Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Cæsarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus."

What happy fellowship! The brethren in Jerusalem did not just send Saul away from the danger, but they went with him before sending him on his way.

31. "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied."

The assemblies were first built up, and then they were found walking in the truth they learned. The result was that the Spirit of God was at liberty to bring comfort and blessing to them by increasing their numbers. Oh! that we too would walk in what we know today!

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2001, Practical Reflections on Acts: Acts 8:36-9:14 (8:36-40)

Acts 8:36-9:14

36-38. "And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? . . . And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him."

If baptism were necessary for salvation—if it were commanded of a saved soul—the eunuch would never have said, "What doth hinder me?" A person under a command does not use such language. The only command given in this Gentile believer's baptism is his own command to stop the chariot (see JND translation).

(Verse 37 is not in the most reliable manuscripts.)

39-40. "And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea."

The channel God uses for a soul's blessing is not necessary for the soul's rejoicing. Believers are to rejoice in the Lord (Phil. 3:1; 4:4). Thus, once Philip has been used to bring the eunuch to Christ, he—not the eunuch's rejoicing—is caught away.

God directed his servant to a new field of service—evangelizing cities—even as He had previously directed Philip to the wilderness to evangelize one soul. His ways are past finding out (Rom. 11:33)!

Chapter 9

12. "And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem."

In Saul's conversion, we see a striking picture of that which marks true salvation.

First, we see that Saul was an enemy of God, and he proved to be so by his wicked thoughts and works (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21).

Second, for all his religious zeal, Saul lacked love and compassion towards others, whether they were men or women (Rom. 1:31; 2 Tim. 3:3).

Third, Saul—bound by a religion of "do"—actively sought to keep others from being made free by the Son of God (John 8:36).

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

Fourth, though acting in good conscience, thinking he was doing God service (Acts 23:1; John 16:2), the darkness of unbelief blinded Saul to the truth. True light must come from God (Gen. 1:3; Eph. 5:8).

4. "And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?"

Fifth, man—at enmity with God—must fall, humble and repentant, before the One with whom he has to do (Heb. 4:13), realizing that it is against God, "against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned" (Psa. 51:4). Though our sin may often hurt or offend another person, it is first and foremost against God that we have sinned.

5. "And he said, Who art Thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

Sixth, Saul owns that there is One to whom he is responsible—who has rights over him. Thus he realizes that in persecuting Christians, it is Jesus Himself he has opposed. Repentance is a vitally important part of salvation (Acts 20:21).

6. "And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."

Seventh, unlike Judaism in which man spends his life doing in order to gain favor with God, Saul, now having divine life, learns what he is to do to please the One who has become his Saviour God.

7. "And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man."

God's testimony—the gospel of His grace through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ at the cross—is going out in this world. Men may hear it, but apart from a work of the Spirit of God, they do not really see. Faith is necessary to see Jesus (John 12:21; Heb. 2:9).

8-9. "And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink."

Christ now becomes the sole object of Saul's heart. He, like the disciples of an earlier day, saw no man, save Jesus only (Matt. 17:8).

The work of conversion deepens. We have no divine record of what transpired in the soul of the beloved Apostle, but we may say that he reflected upon the sufferings of Christ during those three days of darkness in a most solemn, real and deep way.

10. "And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord."

The meaning of Ananias's name is connected with grace. Earlier, in chapter 5, a believer named Ananias and his wife failed of the grace of God (Heb. 12:15) and were removed under God's governmental ways. Now the Lord calls another Ananias to a service—one which will both show and require much grace.

How lovely to see the immediate and willing response from this Ananias. "Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth" (1 Sam. 3:9) is ever the spirit that those redeemed by His precious blood ought to display.

11. "And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth."

The path of service for the Lord Jesus may be difficult—one with trials and testings—but never does He send His servants on a confusing path. Ananias is to follow a straight path to find Saul. May God grant each believer (for each has some service to do for the Lord) to follow the path of His will.

Christian service includes obedience ("arise, and go"), direction ("a street . . . called Straight"), and dependence ("he prayeth").

12. "And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight."

Though the servant of the Lord may not always know why he or she is sent on a service, the Lord who sends His vessel in service is perfect in wisdom and love. At times the servant may ask as Peter did, "I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?" (Acts 10:29), while at other times, as here, the servant has a sense of the reason for his service.

But, whether fully understood or not, may the result of each believer's service today be that of bringing spiritual sight to one abiding in darkness.

13-14. "Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to Thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on Thy name."

Ananias's spirit is beautiful in its innocent concern. No unbelief is expressed as we see with Zacharias (Luke 1:18-20). Ananias's expression is one of loving concern for God's people. Though ignorant of the exceeding abundant grace and ways of the Lord, this dear servant beautifully displays divine, loving concern for God's dear people. May it ever be so displayed in our service!

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2000, Practical Reflections on Acts - 8:20-35 (8:20-35)

20. "But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money."

And so it shall be with all who, in blind arrogance, think they can purchase that which God offers freely. "Yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa. 55:1). "And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17).

21. "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God."

Man's outward religious appearance, diligent efforts at good works, reasonings and philosophies of his mind—none are of value to God. Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). Let us ever remember that "He knoweth the secrets of the heart" (Psa. 44:21).

22-23. "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."

The wickedness hidden inside ("gall") and visible outside ("bond") Simon had completely bound him. Yet God, in infinite, loving grace held open a place of refuge—but it must be entered through the door of repentance. How vitally, eternally important is true repentance before God!

24. "Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me."

Poor, blinded Simon! There was only one safe path open to him. He must bow before God as the publican in a prior day, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). Sadly, like King Saul (1 Sam. 15:15-30), there was evidently no personal reality. He desires Peter to pray for him—to make things right with God for him. Fatal error! "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

25. "And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans."

How beautiful to see the grace of God at work. It took a great persecution to scatter the gospel from Jerusalem to Samaria, by disciples fleeing Jewish religious hatred. Now, as some disciples return to Jerusalem, they too preach the gospel. The persecution resulting from Stephen's martyrdom is still used of God to bring blessing!

26. "And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert."

While many preached the gospel as they fled from Jerusalem, Philip does not seem to have done so. He is referred to as the evangelist in Acts 21:8. He is evidently exercising his evangelical gift when he goes (not "flees") to Samaria to preach the gospel. After his work there is accomplished, the Lord (not "persecution") sends him to another location.

All believers are to do the work of an evangelist—whether in the daily tasks of life or resulting from persecution of the enemy. We are to be instant in season and out of season.

Those who have been given the gift of an evangelist, however, have but one guide—the Lord's voice. Philip's path shows the Spirit's leading (rather than guidance by circumstances—see Psalm 32:8-9) in his travels to Samaria, then to the desert, and finally when taken to Azotus.

27-28. "And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet."

How often in our lives, in order to bless us, the Lord must strip away all that we rest in—position, ability, wealth and friends. Then, placing us in desert circumstances where there is no distraction nor visible means of support, He shows through His Word where the source of true blessing is found.

The eunuch, with the intense longing of an unfulfilled heart, had made a difficult and, no doubt, expensive pilgrimage to the place where he naturally expected to find heart satisfaction. Yet he was returning as empty and unsatisfied as he had come. But in that desert wasteland, he was finally to discover true heart satisfaction.

29. "Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot."

The Spirit's leading and a willingness to identify with those in need are two essential requirements for evangelizing. "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them" (Luke 15:2).

30. "And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?"

We find here three more essential elements of evangelization—eagerness to share, willingness to listen, and ability to discern real soul needs.

31. "And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him."

A sixth essential element of evangelization is humbleness. Philip took the low place until he was invited to come up and help the seeking eunuch.

32-33. "The place of the Scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: in his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth."

Nothing the eunuch had observed in the proud, unbelieving religious display at Jerusalem corresponded to the divine prophecy of Isaiah 53.

34-35. "And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus."

A seventh essential element of evangelization is preaching Jesus. May God ever fill the hearts, minds and lips of all who evangelize with that precious name which is above every name.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2000, Practical Reflections on Acts - 8:4-19 (8:4-19)

4. "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word."

We know that God overrules for blessing—that Satan can never get the upper hand. But these dear believers not only knew that—they put this knowledge into practice. Those dear, persecuted Christians who were scattered everywhere did not spend time telling others of the severity of the persecution, nor of how difficult life had become for them, nor did this persecution discourage them in the path of faith. They preached the Word wherever they were scattered. The very gospel, which had brought this persecution on them, was the joy of their hearts to share with others. May we use every circumstance of life to preach the gospel to others! "Be instant in season, out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2).

5. "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them."

Even the poor Samaritan woman knew that the proud Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. Apart from a work of God in their heart, the Jews could never accept that the Messiah (Christ) would reach out in blessing to the despised Samaritans. Yet, in the day of grace, that is just what Philip the evangelist had the joy of proclaiming—a message of blessing to the unworthy Samaritans through the Christ. Let's not try to determine who is worthy or not to hear of Christ—let's just preach the gospel.

6. "And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did."

God granted special signs to accompany what Philip said. Everyone who heard and saw paid attention to that message. In the measure that our actions support what we preach, people will be willing to listen to us.

7. "For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed."

The message Philip preached was clearly marked by complete power over the effects of sin. We do not expect to see these physical signs today. But they are ever in evidence spiritually. Those in the grip of the wicked one find freedom in Christ. Those unable to control sin and vice which have overtaken them find liberating victory in Christ. Those unable to walk to God's glory are now able to do all to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

8. "And there was great joy in that city."

The Old Testament history of the city of Samaria (the capital of the rebellious ten tribes of Israel) is marked by continual sadness, strife, violence and destruction. And it did not become a happier place after the King of Assyria (2 Kings 17:6) overran it, carrying Israel (those constituting the ten tribes) away captive. But now the work of God in Jerusalem, marked by great grace and great power, reaches out with great joy to the hopeless.

9. "But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one."

Man ever strives—like Simon—to be a great one. But the gospel of God makes nothing of man, for its divine Author made Himself of no reputation. Being great, the Lord Jesus willingly took upon Himself the form of a servant. Believing the gospel brings great joy and true humility to the sinner.

10-11. "To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries."

Satan, the father of lies (John 8:44), would invest Simon with wicked demon power in order to astonish the people. There is much in the world today which in the name of religion seems to accomplish astonishing things. But the true great power of God is publicly displayed in great weakness. "And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:9).

12. "But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women."

The truth of God, the gospel of His grace, produces its effects, not in a display of great power, but in a public display of the symbol of death (the greatest example of weakness known in this world): They were baptized. The gospel makes nothing of man but everything of Christ, and that through His death at the cross.

13. "Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done."

Evidently this servant of Satan believed only what he could see. Simon desired power, and in Philip's preaching, he saw the effects of a power far greater than that which Satan was able to give him. He believed only that there was a power available greater than what he possessed. Being astonished by these displays, he is baptized and connects himself in outward fellowship with Philip.

14. "Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John."

Here is a further, wonderful effect of the gospel of God's grace. Those at Jerusalem—believing Jews—are brought to a place where they happily have dealings with the Samaritans. Peter and John are sent by the apostles to express fellowship with the results of Philip's preaching and to be God's channels of further blessing to the Samaritan outcasts. The true gospel always has this effect—bringing together in unity and joy that which was divided and at enmity.

15-17. "Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet He was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost."

Philip was mightily used of God to bring the gospel to Samaria. And through him, mighty works and miracles were wrought. Yet he is not given power to impart the Holy Spirit to the new believers. How important that we fulfill the service the Lord has given us, without seeking a greater service.

We also learn here that baptism does not impart the Spirit of God. Faith in Christ's finished work does (Eph. 1:13). Though already baptized in the name of Jesus, the Samaritan believers must wait for the apostles from Jerusalem to lay hands on them to receive the Spirit. Thus, in the early church, the unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3) was maintained as the grace of God spread beyond the Jewish nation.

18-19. "And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost."

The Lord had told His disciples, "Freely ye have received, freely give." Unregenerate man seeks to make financial gain of the free grace of God—whether by turning the temple of God into a house of merchandise or seeking to purchase the power of God.

Simon, though baptized (vs. 13), was still an unbeliever. Baptism does not save. Simple faith in Christ alone brings salvation to a lost soul. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2000, Practical Reflections on Acts - 7:48-8:13 (7:48-60)

Acts 7:48-8:3

48-50. "Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool: what house will ye build Me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of My rest? Hath not My hand made all these things?"

The spiritually blinded Jews were proud of their temple, which had taken 46 years to build (John 2:20), thinking this insured the presence of Jehovah. But He could not find rest in a building which had become, through wicked unbelief, a defiled house of merchandise (John 2:16). The longsuffering presence of God among His earthly people was due to His grace and patience, not because of the presence of the temple.

51. "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye."

What good did the outward ritual of circumcision do, when they would not hear or act on God's Word given them by the Holy Spirit? Of what eternal value is the outward name of Christian—bestowed through baptism—if there has been no real work of faith by the power of the Spirit in the soul? Such empty profession produces the grossest kind of conduct by those who call themselves Christians.

52-53. "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it."

What an indictment! Their fathers and they themselves would not have these channels of God's mind, even as they did not honor the Son (Matt. 21:38). The law, divinely received (by the disposition of angels) that they might be blessed, served only to condemn them. How exceedingly solemn today for any who have had free access to the divine Word of God and yet have rejected its truth.

54. "When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth."

The word given by Stephen, through the power of the Spirit of God, was living and "powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword." It cut to the wicked "thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). But rather than allowing a work of repentance, which would cause them to smite their breasts and cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13), they react in the same horrible way in which those in a lost eternity will react—they gnash (Luke 13:28) with their teeth on the one who has told them the truth.

55. "But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God."

What a view filled Stephen's gaze—in the midst of the worst imaginable circumstances. He saw the glory of God and Jesus. And more, he saw the power (Jesus standing at God's right hand) of that coming kingdom (Psa. 63:2; Matt. 6:13; 24:30).

We are exhorted to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). In the measure that is true in a believer, there will be a corresponding view and enjoyment of the Lord Jesus crowned with glory and honor (Heb. 2:9).

56. "And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God."

These wicked rulers had heard the Lord in an earlier day say to them, "But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins" (Matt. 9:6). Still ready to come back in grace and blessing to the guilty nation of Israel, the blessed and rejected Son of Man is here seen standing (not yet seated) at God's right hand. May we believers be ever ready, in like spirit, to show the patient, long-suffering grace of God to a world so often guilty of mistreating and persecuting the children of God.

57-58. "Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul."

What a difference in their loud cry and the loud cry of Stephen (vs. 60)! Their's was a cry of hatred at Stephen's divine vision of Jesus standing in glory; his, a cry of love and forgiveness. Such a horrible reaction is all the worse for the place of divine favor they had been brought into by Jehovah. Yet this place of blessing only brings greater responsibility and condemnation in view of their wicked rejection.

But in the midst of all this darkness, God's divine purposes and counsels shine so brightly. They can never be overruled or defeated by man's failure or the enemy's efforts. At this dark moment we are, for the first time, brought in contact with the zealous and overbearing Saul—later to become Paul the Apostle of the risen Christ, the vessel of the mysteries of Christ and His bride, the church. What grace!

59. "And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

In every extremity, the believer has instant and effectual recourse to God through and because of His well beloved Son, Jesus our Lord.

60. "And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

Stephen had looked up in faith (vs. 55). Now he kneels down in dependence, submission and love. Every day of our Christian pathway, we need to do the same—look up and kneel down.

With words of love and forgiveness fitting to a child of God, Stephen enters the glory and bliss he had seen by faith—he fell asleep. "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed" (1 Cor. 15:51).

Acts 8:13

1. "And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles."

How dark the circumstances seemed—how glorious the victory that God was working! The death of Stephen and the persecution of believers seemed to be a victory for Satan, yet his attempts to destroy the assembly were thwarted in two ways.

First, the gospel was carried to many other parts by those who escaped the persecution at Jerusalem. Those in Judea and Samaria who might not have heard that wonderful message, had the assembly in Jerusalem remained in peace, now were also able to hear of the wonderful works of God.

Secondly, about 40 years after this event, the Roman army under Titus swept into Jerusalem and destroyed it, massacring most if not all the Jews who remained there. This present persecution was used by God to send many believers to places of safety before this awful event took place.

2. "And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him."

It is appropriate to mourn the loss of a saint of God. Though knowing that joy comes in the morning, we weep in this present night when temporary separation through death takes a loved one home.

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

Many homes in Jerusalem were privileged to host believers who gathered in assembly around the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst. Saul's hatred of Christianity, however, even set aside Moses's teaching as to the sanctity of the home in the matter of pledges. "Thou shalt not go into his house to fetch his pledge" (Deut. 24:10). In faith, the Christians had pledged their souls to Christ. The insolent, overbearing zealot was busily dragging that pledge back, either to Judaism or off to prison and death.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2000, Practical Reflections on Acts - 7:34-47 (7:34-47)

34. "I have seen, I have seen the affliction of My people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt."

Our wonderful God is a seeing, hearing and delivering Saviour God. Though at times, while we are passing through adversity, it may seem that He is not taking notice of our trials, still faith trusts Him. Not one thing through which His child passes is unimportant to the Father. And at the perfect time, and in the perfect way, He will come in to deliver.

35. "This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush."

The heart of the Israelite slaves was so faithless that they dared to question and reject the very one God raised up to deliver them. This same danger exists today among God's people. Self-will may reject a servant—God's messenger or deliverer—when sent in a time of individual or collective trial or difficulty.

36. "He brought them out, after that He had showed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years."

Their sad unbelief did not turn God from His purpose of blessing. Egypt, the Red Sea and the forty years of wilderness journey proved two things: (1) God's purposes of grace were unchanged, and (2) the Israelites' hard heart of self-will and unbelief was also unchanged. Now, in Stephen's day, the final appeal was being made to this stubborn people—the often unthankful recipients of divine long-suffering grace and kindness.

37-38. "This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear. This is He, that was in the church [assembly] in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us."

How solemn! "This is that Moses" —a special, chosen vessel of God. He was sent not only to be a deliverer, but he had communed with God, and he spoke the Word of God to them. To reject a servant is to reject God and His Word and to miss the blessing that He would send through that channel.

39. "To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt."

The sad work of rejection of God's authority over them began in their hearts. It was there where they first rejected Moses that they in spirit turned back to the world. How important for believers to guard their heart's affections!

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23).

40-41. "Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands."

Though they received the "living oracles" (the Word of God), it did not profit them, because it was not mixed with faith in them that heard it (Heb. 4:2). Man is religious by nature, but without faith, human reason and his lusting heart will take him from truth and light and into idolatry and the world.

We rightly recoil at the awfulness of worshipping an image (the golden calf; Ex. 32:4) in the place of God. But even believers can be caught up in that spirit of idolatry—the allowance of an object that replaces the blessed Lord in the affections of the heart. And these idols—such as wealth, fame, careers or hobbies—are just as repulsive to God as the calf that Aaron fashioned from the golden earrings.

42-43. "Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to Me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon."

What solemn consequences they reaped! Though chosen of God—His precious, peculiar people—He allowed them to follow the desires of their heart, desires which resulted in seventy sad years of captivity in Babylon. They lost the enjoyment of that good land, flowing with milk and honey, to which Jehovah in long-suffering grace had brought them.

What sorrow and loss Christians experience today—those who have been caught up in the idolatry of humanism, which encourages self-pleasing. Let none be deceived. There will be in each life a time of reaping the fruits of such a course of self-will.

44. "Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen."

More solemn yet! During the very time when they were taken up with idolatrous worship, in their midst was the divine witness of the true God. How dark and horrible the blindness that could not see the glory of Jehovah displayed in the tabernacle.

45-47. "Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus [Joshua] into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; who found favor before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built Him an house."

Generation after generation in Israel's history, though often involved with idolatry, experienced the gracious presence of Jehovah. The tabernacle, with them in the wilderness and the promised land, finally gave way to the glorious temple Solomon built in Jerusalem. But the wonder and privilege of having the presence of Jehovah among them only made them more solemnly responsible for their idolatry and dark unbelief.

"Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48).

20. "In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months."

Moses was the deliverer God would use to bring His beloved people out of Egypt's slavery. How fair (or, lovely [JND]) he was to God. Amram and Jocabed's faith shone brightly. Seeing Moses as God saw him, they diligently and lovingly nourished him for those three critically important months.

Christian parents have very little time with their precious lambs before the world begins to exert its influence—attempting to claim them for its own selfish, godless purposes. May each Christian family see to it that their home is a place of nourishment for their beloved children.

21. "And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son."

In his father's house, Moses was nourished for God's glory and the blessing of His people. In the palace of Pharaoh's daughter, he was nourished according to her desires and for the good of Egypt. For which world are we seeking to nourish our children and our younger brethren?

22. "And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds."

Moses had two natural abilities most valued by the world—eloquence and courage. Added to this, Egypt taught him its special wisdom—a wisdom so advanced that it engineered and constructed the great pyramids. Moses had gained every quality necessary to become a "productive member of society." One possessing such abilities as he might go far, making a great name for himself in this world.

23. "And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel."

Here we find the faith of Moses's parents rewarded. When the time of testing came—full forty years old—Moses visits his brethren. With all of Egypt's wisdom and advantages, his heart had been attached to God's people—his people. Moses desires to leave Egypt's fair courts to visit a poor, enslaved people.

24. "And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian."

All too often, we, like Moses, seek to do a right thing in a wrong way. Love for his brethren caused Moses to seek to deliver the oppressed from his persecutor. But he had not God's guidance in the way he sought to deliver his brother.

25. "For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not."

The people of God rejected Moses, when he would have delivered them, not understanding the desire of his heart for their good. The Jewish leaders, rather than believing Stephen's words and finding true deliverance, through hardness of heart didn't understand God's desire to deliver them from a bondage far worse than Israel experienced in Egypt.

26. "And the next day he showed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?"

Not only did Moses desire to see his brethren delivered from slavery, but he desired their happy oneness. "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psa. 133:1). The desire for liberty and unity for the people of God ought to animate each servant of Christ.

27. "But he that did his neighbor wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?"

The guilty seeks to justify himself, even as the guilty leaders of Israel sought to justify their horrible sin against the Lord Jesus by seeking to silence Stephen. The blinded eyes of the Israelite slave were an apt picture of the blinded eyes of the nation of Israel. Rather than seeing in Moses and in Christ deliverers who would have freed them from bondage, they only see a ruler and a judge.

28. "Wilt thou kill me, as thou didst the Egyptian yesterday?"

A bad conscience and a hardened heart accuse the blesser with bringing death rather than deliverance. But it is the wages of sin which bring death. And the nation of Israel had sinned in the most horrible way possible—slaying the Lord of glory—the Messiah—who came to deliver His people from their sins. Rather than repenting, the nation, as did the Israelite in Moses's day, rejected the only One who could deliver them from their bondage.

29-30. "Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Midian, where he begat two sons. And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sinai an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush."

If the blindness of the nation of Israel was so great that it did not allow the Lord to do many mighty works—did not allow Him to bring them into blessing at that time—there still would be fruit. Christ, the perfect antitype of Joseph was that true "fruitful bough . . . whose branches run over the wall." Thus the Gentiles are brought into blessing through His rejection by Israel.

But God was still working with His beloved earthly people: The bush was burning but not consumed.

31-32. "When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him, saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold."

The God of the Patriarchs was sustaining Israel through its trials and suffering in Egypt. The bush which burned but was not consumed was a picture of the fiery trials through which they passed.

Moses showed an appropriate fear of God. When God, in the person of the Son, walked among His beloved people, the nation collectively showed no such fear of God in their blinded hatred and rejection of the Lord Jesus. Those who looked with the eye of faith saw who it was that stood in their midst.

33. "Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground."

Nothing from within himself could ever provide man with the ability to stand in God's holy presence. If Moses were to stand there and if he were to serve God acceptably, he must learn that his shoes (man's ability to serve) were of no value—rather they were an offense to the presence of holy God.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2000, Practical Reflections on Acts - 7:1-19 (7:1-19)

1-2. "Then said the high priest, Are these things so? And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran."

Ever since Adam sought excuse for his sin—"the woman whom Thou gavest to be with me" (Gen. 3:12)—man has been defending his sin. So, though well knowing that the charges against Stephen were lies, the high priest expected the accused to defend his innocence. Such a course would have given credence to the false charges and made the wicked religious leaders appear to be desirous of the truth.

But dear Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, begins to talk about God rather than himself. What a lesson! Let us ever speak well of Christ, while never seeking to defend ourselves before the world.

3-5. "And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. And He gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet He promised that He would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child."

The Jews were clinging to a place and customs (Acts 6:13-14) but lacked faith, without which it is impossible to please God. Stephen, guided by the Holy Spirit, takes them back to Abraham, in whom they also boasted, showing that he moved by faith, not by sight.

6-7. "And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years. And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve Me in this place."

It should have touched these hard-hearted religious leaders' consciences that they, too, were now in bondage (to the Romans), and like their fathers in Egypt, they, too, needed deliverance.

The place (Jerusalem, the temple and the nation) of which they were so proud was not now where they by faith served Jehovah, but a place of pride to them (John 2:16). How sad when Christianity—that which in the reality of faith brings a soul to the place of nearness to God in Christ—becomes only a source of faithless, fleshly, religious pride of heart.

8-9. "And He gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs. And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him."

Though they might take pride in their heritage as having Abraham for their father (John 8:53), the Spirit of God was using Stephen to exercise their conscience about their fathers' rejection—due to envy and unbelief—of God's deliverer.

These same fleshly feelings may cause believers today to reject one of God's servants, sent in grace to help them, because they are passing through difficulties or so that the difficulties may not have to be experienced.

10. "And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house."

It should have been apparent to these hard-hearted religious leaders that if God were with Joseph (see verse 9) in blessing and raising him to a place of prominence in Egypt, He could not have been with the patriarchs who sold him into slavery.

Was Jehovah with them now in their false accusations against Stephen? How sad for a person to take a stand in direct opposition to the mind of God.

11. "Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance."

Jehovah's promise to bless Jacob was unconditional, but the patriarchs were going to be passed through a time of reaping the consequences of their wicked treatment of Joseph, before they could enjoy the promised blessing of God.

12-14. "But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh. Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls."

If those religious leaders had listened with ears of faith, they too would have heard the blessed, life-giving message: There is corn in Egypt. But to receive that blessing, they must humble themselves, admitting their guilt in betraying their Joseph—delivering the Messiah to be crucified by the Romans. The time is yet future when He will be made known to a repentant nation of Israel.

Joseph called all his kindred to himself. How God desires the blessing of whole families (Acts 16:31)!

15-17. "So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers, and were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem. But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt."

The one part of this world that Abraham seems to have owned was a place to bury his dead (Gen. 23:4). He "looked for a city . . . whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10). May it be so with us. The time when we shall be caught up to be forever with the Lord draws nigh. He has promised mansions in the Father's house for those who trust Him. Faith does not fear that the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation, as did these unbelieving Jews, for we belong to a better country (Heb. 11:16).

18-19. "Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. The same dealt subtilely with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live."

Satan is ever the same in his hatred of Christ and those redeemed by His precious blood. He uses every means at his disposal to bring Christian parents into such cruel slavery and bondage in this present evil world that they cannot display the energy of prayer or the courage of faith in the preserving of their beloved children. His most successful means are often very subtle—hidden under an attractive and harmless-appearing surface. But this wicked angel of light has one object—spiritual devastation, often achieved through the destruction (moral more than physical) of believers' children.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2000, Practical Reflections on Acts - 6:4-15 (6:4-15)

4. "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."

Satan's attempt to turn the apostles aside from ministering the truth to the assembly in dependence upon God fails. The two vital and essential bulwarks of Christian growth are prayer and reading the Bible. Satan uses all means necessary to hinder believers from daily attending to these two vital spiritual activities. May we have purpose of heart to continue instant in prayer and reading, never giving in to distractions the enemy may place in our way as we walk the path of faith.

5-7. "And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of priests were obedient to the faith."

Dependence on God and a desire for peace and blessing in the assembly produce a wonderful display of grace. The seven who were selected were all Grecian believers—the very group who were concerned that their widows were being neglected in the daily ministrations! (See verses 13, 5.)

Another vitally important assembly principle seen here is that ministry must be carried out in fellowship with the apostles' doctrine. There is great activity today done in the name of Christianity. But if the apostles have not expressed fellowship (laying on of the hands) with it, that is, if the ministry is not carried out according to divine truth taught by the apostles, believers do well to separate themselves from such things. The assembly in all its ways should always be in fellowship with the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42).

8. "And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people."

As the day of grace draws to a close, we do not expect to see great wonders and miracles marking Christianity. But believers need more than ever to walk diligently in the fear of God. Walking to His glory amid the confusion of professing Christianity will still require great faith and being filled with the Spirit.

9. "Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen."

Where the Spirit of God is working, Satan will ever be found opposing. But God was infinitely above the enemy's efforts to cause the growing hatred and eventual murder of Stephen. They of Cilicia, whose chief city was Tarsus, must surely have included an insolent, overbearing young man named Saul (1 Tim. 1:13 JND). Gathered together with those who vehemently denied the gospel, he was to become a tremendous trophy of the mighty, sovereign grace of God!

10. "And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake."

Had Stephen by nature been nothing more than an eloquent speaker, these wicked men would have been able to resist and confound his message. But he spoke as the Spirit gave him utterance (Acts 2:4), and they were powerless to withstand his words. The wonderful, divine truth of God, when spoken in any circumstance and in any age, always renders the enemy's opposition powerless. But it is not the ability of the speaker that brings about this effect—it is due to the power of the living Word of God.

11. "Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God."

Open opposition of the truth is raised against Stephen by those who hated the truth. The one who motivated their actions—Satan—is a liar and the father of it (John 8:44), and they were those who changed the truth of God into a lie (Rom. 1:25). They seek to influence the people using the lie of blasphemy against Moses and God. But this only shows the real condition of their heart. Moses, the servant of Jehovah—a mere man—has become more important to them than the God he faithfully served. In the garden Satan led man into sin by suggesting that he could become as gods (Gen. 3:5).

12. "And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council."

The people come first. Once the crowds are stirred up, the wicked leaders feel safe to move according to the desires of their hearts. They had feared the people when the Lord Jesus was here, had used the people to gain their wicked ends with Pilate, and had deceived the people concerning His glorious resurrection. Now they act toward the servant as they had previously acted toward the Master (Matt. 10:25). Today the world, which chose Barabbas instead of Jesus, still rejects God's truth.

13. "And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law."

The sinful, dark condition of the Jewish leaders' hearts is clearly displayed. Stephen is no longer accused of speaking against Moses and God, but against the temple and the law. And even in this, the Word of God is last. They had turned the Father's house of prayer into a house of merchandise while arrogantly flaunting the law they wouldn't obey. Man's religion glorifies and worships what is seen, while it only pretends to value God's Word.

14. "For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us."

The hatred of man's heart willingly and knowingly twists the truth of God. How dangerous are the thoughts of the religious man in whose dark, lifeless heart dwells such animosity against Light, Love and Truth! God's Word then—as today—is to unsaved man nothing more than a book of customs.

15. "And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel."

Stephen's countenance proved the reality of his faith in God's Word, before he spoke. Again we see that action comes before words (James 2:17).

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2000, Practical Reflections on Acts - 5:34-6:13 (5:34-42)

Acts 5:34-6:3

34-35. "Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; and said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men."

Though not a divine message, Gamaliel's warning was timely. Man, so hardened against God's truth, may still be swayed by human reason and may even do the right thing, though without faith in God.

36-37. "For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed."

With all his natural learning, Gamaliel could only equate Jesus, the Son of God, with two common criminals. His human reasoning is flawless, but there is no heart attachment to the ascended Christ. This brilliant and respected doctor of Jewish law by wisdom knew not God, for the preaching of Jesus was foolishness to him (1 Cor. 1:18).

38-39. "And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God."

Gamaliel would exercise prudence in his advice. Though he evidently did not believe in his heart (else he would have openly embraced Christianity), he encourages caution just in case the evident, mighty work was of God!

He seeks neutrality, distancing himself from the hatred of the other Jewish leaders, which, to his cultured mind, was unreasonable. But though he cautions not to fight against God, Gamaliel did not realize that his prudence was as much a rejection of the truth as the open hatred of his brethren. There can be no neutrality with Christ, for the soul that "is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with

Me scattereth abroad" (Matt. 12:30).

40. "And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go."

For all of Gamaliel's reputation, wisdom and prudence, the hearts of the Jewish leaders remain implacable and unchanged in their hatred of Jesus and the gospel of His resurrection. Beatings and threats are the manner in which these hypocrites "refrain" from hindering the work of God!

41. "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name."

The reality of the gospel and faith in the risen Jesus of Nazareth is evidenced in the early church not only in miracles and acts of mighty power, but in seeing those who suffer unrighteously filled with joy. What a testimony to this dark world when a believer suffering for the name of Christ at the hands of wicked men does so with joy, counting such to be a privilege! (See 1 Peter 2:19; 2 Timothy 3:12.)

42. "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."

The apostles submit to the unrighteous beatings, but they did not heed the Jewish leaders' wicked commands to cease preaching the glorious gospel. We should expect and submit to unrighteous persecution for the blessed name of Jesus. But let us never cease doing the work of an evangelist.

Chapter 6:13

1. "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration."

Satan, unable to hinder the early assembly by outward persecution, seeks to corrupt it by discontent from within. The Grecians may have had good reason for their concerns, but the apostles had just given the brethren a wonderful example of quietly suffering injustices and wrongs.

How vital to the spiritual health of assemblies that this humble spirit still characterize the interactions of believers. "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32).

2. "Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables."

Both services are necessary—ministering the Word and ministering to practical needs. But the apostles' service was clearly to teach the doctrine of Christ to believers—the apostles' doctrine. If Satan were successful in drawing them away from that vitally important ministry, a greatly weakened assembly would result.

Each saint of God—young and old—has some specific ministry to accomplish for the glory of Christ and the blessing of His body, the assembly. In any measure that Satan is able to draw one away from their appointed ministry, the body of Christ suffers lack. May we all be diligent in fulfilling that which our blessed Head, the Lord Jesus, has given each to do (Col. 4:17; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).

3. "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business."

The importance of moral weight in personal life is seen early in the assembly. We might think that the first requirement for deacon ministry is that one be full of the Holy Spirit. Yet, though absolutely vital, the Spirit has seen fit to mention "honest report" first. This principle—that one carry moral weight before the world and his brethren—is vital for the health and welfare of the assembly. Today, even though there are no longer apostles, it is just as critical that the life and ministry of each believer be marked by being of honest report.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2000, Practical Reflections on Acts - 5:15-33 (5:15-33)

15-16. "Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one."

A shadow is cast by something which exists in the light. The more believers walk in the light of the glory of God, revealed in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6), the more blessing will result to the spiritually needy with whom they may come in contact.

17-18. "Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison."

What is darker than a faithless, godless religion! Through the apostles' preaching in the name of Jesus, everyone in need who came to the Lord had been healed in Jerusalem. This was the city where blessing was to flow out to the whole world, had the Jews received their Messiah. But the weak, unbelieving leaders—guilty of His death—angrily try to stop the blessing.

19-20. "But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life."

It was night, morally, in the hearts of the leaders of the nation of Israel. They would lock away in prison the truth, even as they had delivered to death the One who is truth. But it is at the morally darkest times, when it seems most impossible to testify of the Lord Jesus, that His power brings liberty and freedom to preach the life-giving message.

21. "And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought."

The Lord Jesus gives liberty; religion imprisons. How far from Jehovah had the leaders of the nation gone! Those who were responsible to be in the temple, leading the people in worshipping God, were instead gathered together seeking to stop the outflow of divine truth.

22-24. "But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow."

We read that where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty (2 Cor. 3:17). The Jews' prison and guards were no more able to contain the apostles who were guided by the Spirit of God than the grave was able to hold the blessed Lord Jesus Christ. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" is a precious truth. The enemy goes to great lengths to stifle the gospel, but those who are led by the Spirit of God are free and at liberty to proclaim the wonderful news of salvation to the lost.

25. "Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people."

The Apostle Paul suffered "trouble, as an evildoer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound" (2 Tim. 2:9). What a comfort to know that the Word of God can never be bound, in spite of our failures or the darkness of the day in which we live.

26. "Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned."

These wicked rulers, no doubt, wished to harm the apostles. But they could not, for "when a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. 16:7). It is wonderful if our ways adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, even as our words speak of the Prince of peace.

27-28. "And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us."

The gospel message is filled with good news and joy. Yet, if faithfully proclaimed, it first affects the conscience, bringing a sense of guilt and responsibility before a holy God. This the religious leaders could not stand. So blinded and hardened were they that the very oath they bound themselves with ("His blood be on us, and on our children"; Matt. 27:25) they now desperately try to refuse to accept.

29. "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men."

This simple, eloquent answer could only have come through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. Do mere men, haters of the blessed name of Jesus, seek to silence those who speak well of Him? What is that to the believer? In relation to the powers that be, Christians ought to obey. When those powers, ordained of God, go beyond their God-given authority, Christians ought to obey God.

30. "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree."

The very God these religious leaders boasted in and the One whom the patriarchs trusted in had raised from among the dead the blessed Jesus whom they would deny. Their fathers had trusted in God, yet they who were descendants of the patriarchs were guilty of slaying His Son, their Messiah.

The faith of family members is precious—a priceless heritage—but it does not in itself benefit unless personal faith in each member is in exercise. It is eternally fatal to rest in family religious position.

31. "Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins."

They condemned Jesus to death, spit in His blessed face, cast Him out, mocked Him and rejected Him, but God exalted Him. Rather than execute the judgment their wicked acts deserved, God (the God of their fathers) was offering through that despised One repentance and forgiveness.

This is the heart of our blessed God—what a striking example of grace abounding to the chief of sinners! And it is so with every soul who has come to God in true repentance, confessing that complete lack of even one good thing found within themselves. Each has come away eternally blessed.

Mephibosheth, who as Saul's grandson had good reason to fear reprisal from David, received instead, for the sake of another, all the possessions of Saul his grandfather and, most wonderful of all, a place at the king's table. This is abounding grace such as our blessed God delights to bestow upon unworthy sinners for the sake of His beloved Son.

32. "And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him."

Believers who bear witness to divine truth in the world have confidence that their testimony is supported by and in fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

33. "When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them."

The truth that Peter preached had pricked their hearts and many were saved (Acts 2:37). Now the truth cuts their heart as will Stephen's message in Acts 7. The result, rather than blessing, is murderous outrage and hatred. Oh! how solemn to continually reject God's divine truth!

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2000, Practical Reflections on Acts - 4:34-5:14 (4:34-37)

Acts 4:34-37

34-35. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

All earthly possessions were placed at the disposal of the apostles for those in need. If following the apostles' pattern of giving to those in need guides us, the happy result will surely be blessing to others.

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

Under the law a Levite expected to receive from others (Deut. 26:12-13), for he had no possessions in this world (Num. 18:23). Under grace Barnabas, a Levite, takes what he had and puts it at the Lord's disposal to give to others. Let us be cheerful givers (2 Cor. 9:7), walking as those who have nothing and yet possess all things (2 Cor. 6:10).

Acts 5:1-14

12. But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Previous to this solemn account, Satan's attempts to corrupt the assembly had come from without (Acts 2:13; 4:23,17-18). Now he seeks to corrupt from within, by using covetousness (keeping back part of the money) which then led to deceit and lies. God does not need our puny wealth, but He must have reality—truth in the inward parts (Psa. 51:6).

35. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? While it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.

The early believers were filled with the Spirit of God (ch. 2:4; 4:31; 13:52), but Ananias's heart is filled by Satan with covetousness and lies. The Word of God is silent as to the reality of this couple's faith, for their actions were not consistent with their profession. Let us walk in reality and in fear before God.

6. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.

The "young men" (representing strength and service), guided by the Spirit, realizing the assembly had a need, fulfilled that ministry, apparently without receiving special directions. Love for Christ and communion with Him produce intelligent service.

7-9. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.

Peter gave opportunity for Sapphira to repent and confess her sin, but she persisted in covering it (Prov. 28:13) and fell under solemn judgment.

10. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.

Sapphira falls dead at the feet of Peter—a place where others had laid their wealth and possessions. The young men must again undertake a sad but necessary service. The way in which they perform it, however, is beautiful in its moral seemliness. Her body is not "wound up" by them (as was Ananias's), but with as little contact as possible, they simply carry the body out, burying it by her husband.

11. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

One can hardly think of an event more calculated to prove the truth of Psalm 89:7: "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him."

We find in Romans 3:18 that fallen man as a race has no fear of God. Sadly, today the fear of God seems lacking even among those who profess Christianity. While believers ought never to be afraid of our God and Father, we should be very careful to act in a way which is pleasing and honoring to Him.

12. And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.

Miracles that were done provided indisputable proof of the truth and power of the gospel. Today, a soul redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, walking in the newness of life (Rom. 6:4) and shining as a light in the midst of a crooked and perverse world (Phil. 2:15) gives similar testimony.

Solomon's porch pictures the entrance into coming millennial blessing for Israel. But a greater than Solomon is here, and the proper hope for the assembly is heavenly, not earthly glory.

13. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.

The judgment that had come on Ananias and Sapphira served as a solemn safeguard, for a time, to any who might seek to connect themselves with the assembly without a reality in their hearts.

14. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)

The assembly in Jerusalem grew, both in the esteem of those who observed it and in the numbers of those who were saved. Some may argue that Christians must be careful not to drive people away from the Lord by being too legal. Yet here, when all Jerusalem was aware that unfaithfulness to the name of Christ cost two souls their lives, the numbers in the assembly increased, rather than decreased. Though today we may not always see increased numbers, faithfulness to Christ will always result in increased blessing.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2000, Practical Reflections on Acts - 4:16-33 (4:16-33)

16. Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it.

Fear of the people (Prov. 29:25), not any sense of uprightness, kept the leaders from denying the truth. Repentance born of faith—not caused by miracles—leads to true blessing (Luke 16:31).

17. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.

Neither the world nor its religions will hear that name, the source of all power and blessing. Even in these Christian lands it is easy to speak of God, church or the Bible—anything but that blessed name of Jesus.

18. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

Though the spirit of this present, evil world will not hear about Jesus, the glory and authority of His name are reasons enough to continue speaking of and teaching about Him.

19. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

The apostles' decisions were made as responsible to One infinitely greater than the Jewish leaders, nor were they "careful to answer" the Jews (Dan. 3:16).

20. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

They had seen perfection in every step of the Lord's life—had heard grace and truth in His every word. What motives for preaching the gospel!

21. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done.

These religious zealots' wicked threats and plans were governed by the whims of the people. The believers' blessed resource is the Lord (Heb. 13:6).

22. For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was showed.

The cripple's condition provides a picture of Israel (born lame), whose religion could not bring blessing (begging at the temple gate). His healing is a proof of the grace and power of God.

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

Their own company—fellowship with those of like precious faith! Where we go when “let go” from our necessary daily routines is a profound test of our spiritual state. How we use this liberty speaks volumes about who and what we are enjoying.

24. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, Thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is.

The Jews' opposition brings forth collective praise from the assembly to God who is above all.

25. Who by the mouth of Thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?

David, the very one in whom they took such pride, prophetically condemned them, connecting them with the Gentiles in their hatred of Jesus.

26. The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ.

The elite of the world find a common ground of fellowship in their rebellion against God and His Sent One, Jesus. Why spend our time searching for satisfaction in this wicked, Christ-hating world?

27. For of a truth against Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together.

A better reading is, “Thy holy servant Jesus.” Our blessed Lord and Saviour came meek and lowly, as a servant, that man might be blessed through His perfect service. Those who by nature opposed each other united not only against this perfect servant, but against God who sent Him.

28. For to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done.

Man was fully responsible for what he did to the Son of God—but God moves according to His own sovereign purposes and counsels. Let us always seek to be in fellowship with His sovereign ways.

29. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto Thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak Thy word.

They did not ask for power to overcome or stop persecution. They leave all with God, submitting to His ways, desiring only that the Word of God would not be hindered (Rom. 12:19; 2 Thess. 3:1).

30. By stretching forth Thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of Thy holy child Jesus.

They weren't occupied with self—as being vessels of healing and miracles. All was left to the will of God and the power and authority of the blessed name of His holy servant (not “child”) Jesus.

31. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

What blessing earnest collective prayer brings (Eph. 3:20)! They had asked that the servants of God speak forth His Word with boldness (vs. 29). But God gave them all the ability to speak it boldly! Let us continue instant in earnest prayer (Rom. 12:12)!

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

The Spirit produced oneness in love and in practice. Their earthly possessions, belonging to God, were used for the blessing of all. Should God get just a tenth of our possessions? They all belong to Him. May we be tender and wise hearted in using all that He has given to us for His honor and glory.

33. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

Great power and great grace marked the public testimony of the early assembly. Today, public testimony to the unity of the body of Christ has been spoiled because of our collective failure. Yet in the midst of this ecclesiastical confusion we still have available the power of the Spirit (Rom. 15:13) and the grace of Christ (2 Tim. 2:1). The Spirit of God and the grace of God remain unchanged. We still can walk as Elisha the man of God in the midst of great breakdown and ruin among God's people. Elisha especially pictures one who walks in faith by the power of God in grace, though the day morally be ever so dark.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 1999, Practical Reflections on Acts: Acts 3:8-26 (3:6-26)

8. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

The first movement of this man, born lame, was to leap. What power in the name of Jesus! The natural mind understands steady progress over time, but this is beyond human reason a clear testimony to God's work. Christians develop and mature in their spiritual growth (1 John 2), but eternal life itself is perfect and complete when imparted (1 John 1:2; 5:11).

The cripple stood, walked and entered the temple, giving a lovely pattern of normal Christian growth—standing by faith, walking in dependence and entering into the place of His appointment by the leading of the Spirit. Being thus found where He is in the midst, joy and acceptable worship result.

9. And all the people saw him walking and praising God.

What good would it have been if the apostles had given him silver and gold, yet left him a cripple? There would be no walk or praise for God from him. But now, though just as poor in earthly goods as he was before, he gives clear testimony to those unsearchable riches of Christ. Let us—both in walk and word—enjoy those same divine riches!

10. And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.

"And they knew!" The actions of the healed cripple produced amazement in those who knew him. Oh! that the power of God might be so displayed in our lives!

11. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.

The lame man held those who had brought healing and blessing to him. Let us hold fast the Word of God which has brought us eternal blessing.

Rather than believing thus, in type, entering into the blessing prefigured in Solomon's porch they wondered at the miracle which had taken place.

12. And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?

Earlier Peter had said to the cripple, "Look on us." Now he rebukes the Jews for doing that very thing! But the cripple had need; the Jews had mere curiosity. True Christianity and its blessings are not intended to satisfy man's curiosity. Let us see that we, by our life and words, draw attention only to Christ who is the worthy One the source of all blessing.

13. The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go.

Earlier, Peter had talked about David. Now he talks of another group that was a source of pride to the nation: the Patriarchs. The God of their fathers had glorified His Son Jesus—Jesus of Nazareth. What a privilege Christians have to bear testimony to Jesus the Son of God where He has been rejected!

14. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you.

Not only had they given up the Holy One, but they had chosen a murderer in His place. Such is the horrible choice the natural heart will make in every circumstance of life.

Now if there was to be blessing, they must hear and believe the truth a most painful truth which would test them to see if there were true repentance. The miracle had gained their attention. Peter's message must gain their heart. How vital to reach the heart rather than the mind with the gospel!

15. And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.

What a horrible choice they made desiring a murderer and becoming murderers themselves! Not only was the nation guilty of murdering the Prince of Life, but the Lord was now alive, and witnesses to His resurrection were in their midst. Who can tell the horrible depths to which the human heart may go in rebellion against its Creator! (See Jeremiah 17:9.)

16. And His name through faith in His name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

Faith in the name of Jesus, whom they hated and had denied, produced this miracle they couldn't deny. What a powerful sermon the healed cripple preached by his actions. What about our actions?

17. And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.

Grace healed the man in the name of Jesus now it opens the city of refuge to the guilty nation. The Lord Jesus had said on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," and Peter continues that message, opening the door of escape, if they would flee to it. Oh! that we who have been the recipients of such marvelous grace would show this same spirit to others (Eph. 4:32).

18. But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled.

All that God had spoken written in the prophets concerning the Messiah's sufferings has been fulfilled. The prophets foretold His sufferings, while we preach a soon-returning Saviour's glory. He said, "Surely I come quickly." His words will be fulfilled!

19. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.

What wonderful blessing repentance brings! Had the nation repented, those times of blessing promised to the Patriarchs—that which Solomon's reign prefigured—would have immediately begun. Repentance is always the door to joy (Prov. 28:13-14).

20-23. And He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto Me; Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever He shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.

Not only had they murdered the Prince of Life, but they had killed the Prophet promised by Moses, who brought the mind of God to them. Today believers, in the same spirit of self-will, can in like manner reject God's mind sent to them through His servants. Oh! the sad consequences of refusing to listen to the Word of God no matter who the vessel is that is used to bring it to His children. May we, with tender hearts and consciences, listen to the messages our God sends through His servants.

24-26. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2000, Practical Reflections on Acts - 3:24-4:15 (3:24-26)

Acts 3:24-26

24. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.

When the priesthood failed in Eli (1 Sam. 4:18), the people no longer had a way to be brought into the presence of God. He graciously raises up prophets who will bring Him through His Word to them.

God's prophets speak the same truth, for He and His truth never change (Mal. 3:6). That truth centers upon His beloved Son (John 14:6). May we hold the truth of God taught us by "faithful men" (2 Tim. 2:2), speak "the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15), teach "the same thing" (1 Cor. 1:10) and receive the truth sent for our present need (1 Thess. 2:13).

25. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

They were the descendants (the seed of Abraham) of those who preached the coming Messiah. It was with their fathers that God had made His covenant. Yet they were guilty of casting out and murdering the One in whom all these promises were to be fully realized. Without faith, position and knowledge are helpless to produce blessing. Being raised in a Christian home and being brought to the bosom of the assembly—great blessings indeed—do not automatically impart reality before God.

26. Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

The Lord Jesus as Messiah had come, sent from God to the people in order to turn them from their sin and disobedience. And they were the more responsible, for He had come first to them. With privilege comes solemn responsibility.

Acts 4:1-15

1. And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them.

Satan uses the religious leaders of that privileged nation in order to stifle divine truth. The nation had drifted far from God, for its leaders openly taught evil doctrine concerning the resurrection (Mark 12:18; Acts 23:8). It is so today—Christianity, which ought to have been a beacon of pure truth, has become the dwelling-place of every foul and wicked Christ-dishonoring doctrine (Matt. 13:32; Rev. 18:2).

2. Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

"Being grieved" at the truth! The awful result of giving up what once they possessed, they chose a liar rather than the Truth. Thus the truth of life from death through resurrection—hope and joy to believers—is a source of grief to them. How blind a dead, faithless religion makes man (Matt. 15:14)! They chose a hopeless grave, rather than bow before Jesus—the Prince of Life!

3. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.

It was morally "eventide" in the hearts of these servants of Satan. Earlier, the enemy had sought to turn aside God's blessing, by using men to "mock" (Acts 2:13). Now the enemy seeks to "shut up" the testimony by physical, rather than verbal, means. Joseph—a blessing in prison just as much as when in Potiphar's house or Pharaoh's court (Gen. 39-40)—gives wonderful encouragement today when the enemy is so busy hindering the truth of God.

4. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.

The apostles are put in hold, unable to preach the truth in full liberty—but the Spirit of God is not restrained. The company of believers keeps growing. We needn't give up preaching and spreading the truth of God. The power (the Spirit) is the same and the Word is the same, and He promises the truth will not return to Him void (Isa. 55:11).

56. And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.

The whole responsible leadership of the Jews is represented here and they take sides against Jehovah and His Christ. It is not the Gentiles, but the very leaders of the Jewish nation who were responsible before God and who gather together against the truth. Professing Christianity is fast moving to this same gross darkness and unbelief (Matt. 6:23).

7. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?

They couldn't deny the miracle, but having "denied the Holy One and the Just" (Acts 3:14), they are blinded as to the power that worked this healing. The actions of our lives ought to cause those around to ask "by what power" we are enabled to walk in peace through this dark world (1 Peter 3:15).

8. Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel.

The solemn message—directed to those most responsible for the death of the Messiah—must be given by one under the control of the Spirit of God. Believers are to be filled with the Spirit of God (Eph. 5:18). Only then can a truly effective, fruitful testimony for Christ be rendered in this world.

9. If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole.

"If we be examined." Christians will always be scrutinized by the world. May the world only find "good deeds" to examine in our lives, rather than things which dishonor the Lord (1 Peter 3:17).

10. Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole.

What an indictment! The despised name of Jesus and their horrible guilt concerning Him and God's complete satisfaction were gloriously shown in His resurrection. And before their very eyes, the healed cripple gave proof to the truth they denied.

11. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

Building a happy life that glorifies God must start with this Stone—Jesus Christ—rejected in the world, yet chosen of God and precious (1 Peter 2:4). They wanted their place and nation (John 11:48) but rejected God's foundation for getting that blessing.

12. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

The blessed name of Jesus, so hated of the Jews, is the only hope for them and the world. The urgency of Peter's message is found in the words, "must be saved"—not "can be saved." Salvation is not a choice left to man's will; it is a must, and solemn, eternal issues rest on obeying the gospel.

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

It was not so much the words that Peter and John spoke, but the manner of their bold testimony that surprised these learned religious antagonists (Prov. 28:1). They saw more with their eyes than they heard with their ears. What they saw caused them to marvel, knowing the apostles—unlettered and uninstructed men (JND)—had been with Jesus. Here again we see the Spirit press the importance of our actions over our words.

14. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

The healed cripple didn't talk, he didn't walk, he didn't leap—he stood. For him it was now a time of standing with those who proclaimed the truth. What a powerful silent testimony to Peter's words he gave! We need wisdom and grace to act thus, "and having done all, to stand" (Eph. 6:13).

15. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves.

No room for divine truth in this group! Their deliberations were among themselves—God in whom they boasted was left out. The subject was how to stifle the truth they could not deny, even as they had tried to stifle the truth of His glorious resurrection (Matt. 28:12-13).

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 1999, Practical Reflections on Acts: Acts 2:42-3:7 (2:42-47)

42. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

The reality of a work of God is beautifully proven in a soul that continues. An evident work of God is always tested and, if real, endures.

The occupation of the early assembly is recorded. They continued steadfastly in that divine revelation which the apostles taught. The fellowship of the early church was inseparably connected with the apostles' doctrine.

The result of walking in that fellowship was that the brethren had the continual joy of answering to the Lord's desire: "Remember Me."

The means of continued blessing and joy in the early church was the result of earnest, collective prayer, expressing dependence on the Lord.

43. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

When the Spirit moves, even unbelievers know something infinitely beyond themselves has happened, causing an appropriate fear. Too often, what passes as a work of God today is used by professing Christendom as an unseemly display of supposed spiritual power. The world often reacts to this with ridicule and scorn, rather than in fear and trembling. Though we don't live in days of apostolic power, may God help our actions to bear a sober and true testimony to Christ, before all who observe us.

44. And all that believed were together, and had all things common.

Together! What blessedness characterized that early church! Alas! today man has so failed that there remains little outward testimony of Christian unity. Still, each believer is to endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace."

When the 120 first met (Acts 1:15; 2:1), they are characterized as being "together" and in "one accord." Happy condition! The addition of great numbers (3000 souls) did not disrupt that blessed divine unity they were still together in spirit.

Unlike the Jew under law who had boundaries and landmarks to mark his possession, being one in Christ, they had all things common. What a testimony to the Jews who observed the early believers.

45. And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

Even more than having all things common, the natural result of the early oneness was the care for the needs of each member of the body. This was a practical demonstration that "members should have the same care one for another" (1 Cor. 12:25).

Christianity does not give earthly riches. It was the believers' needs that were supplied, not their wants (Phil. 4:19). This same spirit of care for one another ought to characterize believers today, though the expression of it will be different.

46. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.

The early believers—all Jews by natural birth—became, in a way, even more faithful and godly Jews. They were found daily at the temple. Though that Jewish character of the early church gradually faded away, for a time such faithfulness was allowed and used of God as a testimony to the nation.

Because of the great number of disciples, the Lord's supper was carried on in separate homes. But they remembered the Lord in the fellowship of one body. The Spirit's work in these converts also affected daily life (such as eating meals), causing joy and providing another testimony to the risen Jesus. This same spirit of joy and unity ought to characterize believers in all areas of life today.

47. Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Joy in the heart results in praise from the lips. Their joy and expressions of praise provided yet another wonderful testimony to the people. The disciples didn't have to try to be a testimony their happiness in the Lord made them such. A happy believer, walking in a spirit of praise, always provides an effective testimony for Christ to the world.

The Lord added souls to the assembly ones that were to be saved. A time of solemn judgment was about to fall on the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem. For the saved Jews, the assembly became, in a very real way, a city of refuge from that coming time of sorrow. It ought to still have that character among those gathered today.

Acts 3:1-7

1. Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.

Together! How often is this word used to characterize the actions of the early church in Jerusalem -together in preaching, in worship, in distributing to needs and in dependence on the Lord. What a blessed thing is unity!

How important the hour of prayer is in our lives. Here a wonderful miracle was about to bring blessing to a helpless cripple. But it begins with believers who desire to be together to pray. Unity and dependence—marvelous keys to blessing!

2. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple.

A striking picture of Israel under law! This poor man was crippled from birth, unable to do anything to gain God's favor. He must beg for a little, while the One that was cast out and crucified freely offers, in grace, the riches and blessings of heaven to faith.

The gate, though beautiful to the natural eye, no longer was the entrance into blessing for the individual Jew or the nation. True Christian testimony today must come from the inward man. Outward appearances, no matter how impressive, are not the source of blessing, nor are they the proof of blessing in Christianity. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

3. Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked an alms.

Peter and John were visible to those in need. Christians need to live before the world, not hide from it. "Let your light so shine." The world saw them and their actions. The conduct of Peter and John did not repulse or discourage the one who had need. What an important example for believers!

4. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.

Peter, taking special note of the lame man, commands him to look at them. Can we say to the world, "Look on us"? What a sobering thought! What does the needy world see as it gazes at those who call themselves by that blessed name of Christ?

5. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

If man thinks he can get something for himself, he will listen to any message. Satan, as an "angel of light" makes false offers of great gain, in order to trap and destroy men. We who by faith are partakers of the true riches and have freely received need to learn how to freely give (Matt. 10:8).

6. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

Men, blinded by Satan's lies, believe that silver and gold are the means to achieving great happiness but in reality the riches of this world often buy only great sorrow (1 Tim. 6:9). We must be careful that the blessed name of Christ is never attached to the thought of material gain. Silver and gold would make the name Christian popular in a world that despised and murdered Jesus of Nazareth. True riches are dependent on real, living faith in that blessed name.

7. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

Peter didn't just talk; he acted. We must act in like faith on the Word of God, if the needy are to be blessed. Peter, lifting the cripple up, proved that there was power in the name of Jesus. Let us always do all in His name the source of true blessing.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 1999, Practical Reflections on Acts: Acts 2:29-40 (2:29-40)

29-30. "Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne."

Then, as patriarch of the kingdom, David's life brought blessing. Now they had only his sepulcher containing his bones no blessing there!

But the patriarch had also been a prophet. They not only had his sepulcher, but they had his inspired words. They gloried in the former but did not have faith to lay hold of the latter. How important that we not get occupied with the vessel that is used, but in faith lay hold of the words of life that are delivered through it, from God to our hearts.

31. "He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption."

Though David won mighty victories over Israel's enemies, it was faith that gave him to view an infinitely mightier victory, the resurrection of Messiah from the dead a victory in which the corruption of the grave did not touch the Victor.

32. "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses."

Witnesses! God has given full testimony through innumerable witnesses to the truth concerning the person and work of Christ. Peter and the others were witnesses of His humble life and His glorious resurrection; they were "eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Pet. 1:16). Oh! that our lives might bear witness to His person, majesty and work.

33. "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear."

Did they need proof that the lowly Jesus of Nazareth was risen and exalted at the Father's right hand? They had both seen and heard the Witness the Spirit poured out as a consequence of His exaltation. What is seen and heard in our lives today? Is it that which glorifies our risen Lord? "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18).

34-35. "For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, until I make Thy foes Thy footstool."

It is not David—the one in whom they gloried—but the lowly Jesus whom they despised that now sits in the place of power. Until they repented, they were foes of Him whom David owned as Lord. How important that believers walk in moral separation from the ways of this

“present evil world” a world which is a foe of the Lord Jesus Christ.

36-37. “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

How could Peter, an “unlearned and ignorant” fisherman, speak so as to cause this powerful effect of troubling the consciences of that great crowd of devout Jews? He used the Word of God, as guided by the Spirit of God. That gave moral authority to his words, convicting his hearers. This same effect will also be produced today if there is submission to the Spirit’s guidance using the Word.

Evidently the other apostles had been standing by Peter as he spoke without saying anything themselves. The troubled listeners cry out for help, both to the one who spoke and to those with him.

We may not always speak verbally about our Lord, but our lives ought to be found morally standing with those who are speaking the truth of God.

38. “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

Peter was the one who answered the question directed to the group of apostles. The others, recognizing that the Spirit was using Peter in this particular instance, made no attempt to answer. What a wonderful oneness of mind!

How good to learn to wait quietly when another servant is being used by the Spirit. In such instances, silent prayer may be of much greater help than public participation.

Peter’s answer to their question begins with the word “repent.” What rich blessings we often lose as believers because we do not walk before our God in a repentant spirit! “A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise” (Psa. 51:17). “But whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Prov. 28:13).

39. “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.”

What a wonderful encouragement for those who in faith and submission move in a repentant spirit before God: blessing for them, for their children, and even for those for whom blessing seemed impossible—those that are afar off. Truly, our God delights to bless the contrite in heart!

40. “And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.”

“Testify and exhort.” The Spirit records the essence of Peter’s message, rather than his exact words. Those to whom he spoke were identified with a nation existing under judgment. That caused Peter to speak earnestly. Let’s live and speak in the same fervent spirit that precious souls might still be delivered from coming judgment.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 1999, Practical Reflections on Acts: Acts 2:14-28 (2:14-28)

14. But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words.

“With the eleven.” The first gospel message preached after the formation of the church had the full support and fellowship of the apostles. So too the words we preach (indeed, all we say) ought to be in full fellowship with the apostles’ doctrine.

15. For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.

Under the power of divine grace, Peter does not rebuke their wicked mockery. He does, however, deal with it as “that which is natural” (1 Cor. 15:46), soberly giving answer to their irreverent jesting.

16. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.

Having arrested their attention by his calm reply which they could not gainsay, he begins to answer their unbelief, using “that which is spiritual.” If we are to effectively share the Word with others, this same calm spirit with Scriptural order and divine guidance must be used.

17. And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

The message, though distinctly Jewish in character (Joel 2:28-32), announces blessing available for all mankind (upon all flesh), while the words “last days” confer urgency. Believers’ lives today young and old ought morally to conform to the Lord’s warning in Luke 21:34: “And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.”

18. And on My servants and on My handmaidens I will pour out in those days of My Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

"Servants" and "handmaidens." Outward, public service and quiet, unseen service for Christ must be energized by the Spirit. Service submitted to and directed by Him will result in blessing, bringing God (prophesy) to those who are in need.

19. And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke.

Such signs as Peter speaks of aren't characteristic of the present day of grace. But the realities of death (blood), judgment (fire) and sorrow (smoke) are, and they form a solemn, necessary gospel warning.

20. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come.

Before the Lord appears in that coming day of solemn judgment, all that man has relied on (without acknowledging God as the Giver) for his life and guidance won't provide comfort or help. Today, believers especially need daily enjoyment of communion with the Giver not just His gifts.

21. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

These words of hope, though taken from the Old Testament prophecy of Joel, are rightly applied by Peter as guided by the Spirit to their current needs. We should also allow the Spirit full liberty to apply, as He sees fit, all of the Word Old and New Testaments—to every circumstance of our lives.

22. Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.

"Jesus of Nazareth." The lowly, despised "carpenter's son" (Matt. 13:55) is the one Peter preaches. They had witnessed His mighty works. Oh! the joy of connecting our lives and testimony in this world to this humble, rejected Jesus.

23. Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.

God gives; man takes and murders. God's sovereign purposes never set aside man's solemn responsibility for crucifying the Lord of glory. Peter did not seek to gain their ear by speaking "fair words." They were guilty of terrible, wicked acts against Messiah. He tells them the truth. Initially it may have offended them. But solemn, eternal issues rest on their hearing and submitting to God's truth.

24. Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it.

Man's part in the cross was to slay the innocent one. God raised Him from the dead. Impossible that death, the conquered foe, could hold the Conqueror! It was not possible for the grave to hold Him! In a world of death, sorrow and hopelessness, what a glorious hope is Christ's resurrection! Let us boldly live and proclaim it before those without hope.

25. For David speaketh concerning Him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved.

The Lord was David's constant object of life. Faith gave David that view the Lord's presence was a living reality "He is on my right hand." So the Lord's constant presence and strength is our joy. "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

26. Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope.

Faith that knows in reality the Lord's presence and strength in resurrection life brings joy, praise, rest and hope. Hope in a hopeless scene! What a bright message we have to proclaim to the lost!

27. Because Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption.

Faith gives confidence in the unseen. David, knowing not Jesus, but by faith looking for Messiah and in faith prophesying of Him, looked forward to what we see as an accomplished fact. Jesus' grave is empty. He is risen and we are risen with Him. Death has lost its sting and the grave its victory, and light has appeared in the region and shadow of death.

28. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; Thou shalt make me full of joy with Thy countenance.

The Lord Jesus has said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). In walking by faith with Him, believers have the same assurance as David had that in following Him we walk in the "way of peace" (Rom. 3:17) and the "way of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:21). David found that being in the ways of life brought joy, with the thought of seeing the Lord.

What a motive for obedience the thought of seeing the blessed Lord Jesus face to face in glory! May that blessed hope and joy constrain our hearts and feet to walk pleasing to Him in every step.

"Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8).

Ed.

Walla Walla Conference: 1996, Your Journey of Life, Acts 27:1, Luke 2:42-45, 9:1-3 (27:1)

As I am. Without one way. Thank you. Open with me to read the 1St 12 Words of Acts chapter 27. Verse one. Acts, Chapter 27. The 1St 12 words. Of verse one. I'm going to read it. Slightly perhaps different in the J&D translation.

But when it had been determined that we should sail to Italy. Perhaps most of us in this room tonight are very well acquainted with this passage, which tells us about the voyage that the beloved apostle Paul took. With those prisoners, those other prisoners. Their destination was Rome. Their destination was Caesar's tribunal in Rome, there to be judged for their deeds. We well know that the beloved apostle was innocent. All that was going on. In that sense, here was of God's ordering. But what I want to do tonight is speak to the hearts of each one in this room, who can understand what I'm saying from the youngest. To the oldest to tell you that you. Two are on a voyage tonight. And that voyage is going to end, in a sense, the same as this voyage ended. With the prisoners standing before Caesar, however, the voyage that you're on tonight, the voyage of life, the journey that you're on. Whether you've been on that journey ever so few years, or whether you've been on that journey for a long, long time, that you, my friend, will stand before a far more solemn tribunal, the holy righteous God of this universe. If tonight. You would enter eternity. Loss a stranger to the Lord Jesus Christ. As your personal savior. And so here we have a story. It's not my intent to go over this story. But just to consider a little background to set the stage for what I have on my heart, as it were. We have a journey that. People are going to take. It says. And when it had been determined, they didn't determine that they were going to take that journey, it was determined for them. You, we might say, had no choice about beginning your journey of life. But you're on that journey tonight. Whether you made it, Whether or not there was a conscious choice or decision, you certainly didn't make it. But you most surely are on a journey. And the journey that you're on, every single soul in this room tonight. I say there's going to be an end of that journey. The time will come. Sooner or later, beloved children, you that are very young sitting here, if you can understand what I'm saying. Each one of us, those of us who are older, we perhaps, as we go on, have a growing sense of it. That the journey of life whereon has an end in this. World. And should the blessed Lord Jesus Christ. Wait to come for his beloved bride that long. Every soul in this room will come to a point. Where their journey will end? And then you will have a destination. You will have reached the destination in one of two places. The tribunal that we spoke of pictured by Caesar's court. Or in the presence of the Blessed Lord Jesus Christ. In glory forever, those two thieves on the cross one. Ended in one place, the other in paradise. And their life's journey came to an abrupt and violent end. Forgive me if. In here have heard this story. Perhaps it will illustrate the solemnity.

Of this journey, in a way, and the seriousness of the decisions that you will make which will affect. The outcome of the journey that you are on tonight. A brother recounted this to me. I trust I have the details right. During the Second World War, AUS naval vessel was sailing. And it was a very, very stormy night. Very difficult to see anything. And as the vessel was sailing through the seas, being tossed in this fairly severe storm. Off in the distance and on a direct collision course with this vessel, showing a very bright light. The captain immediately asked the man in charge of communications. To send a message warning that vessel with that light of the danger. Of the course that it was on. And so the message went out. This is a US naval vessel. You are on a collision course. Change your course. And for a while there was number answer. And a little while longer went by and there was still no answer. The light shone, perhaps a bit closer. No answer. And so the captain asked that the message again be sent more urgently. You're on a collision course with the United States naval vessel. Change your course. The light still shone. The storm blew no answer. The captain himself came down to the communications room. And he took the microphone or whatever device he used to send a message. And he said this is the captain of the United States battleship. You are on a collision course. Change your course. There was continued silence and then a message came back. And it said this is a United States. Lighthouse. You should change your course. Tonight, dear friends, everyone of us is on a journey. There are two destinations. We read about one of those destinations. Well, we read about a general warning in Acts chapter 17. In verse 31. He God hath appointed a day into which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man. Whom he hath ordained, O beloved friends. Tonight. Is it going to be at the end of the journey you're on that you haven't heeded the warnings? I'm looking into faces that I have no doubt have heard warnings time after time after time. Warning you of danger of judgment, telling you of God's righteousness, his righteous holy claims, telling you of a blessed Savior of the Lord Jesus Christ, his beloved Son, who went to the cross, shed his precious blood, that you might be saved. And you've heard that over and over again. What are you doing? What course are you on? You see the light up in front of you, as it were. Are you going to stay on a collision course tonight? Is your life's journey going to continue on as it is stranger to the Lord Jesus? You know, though, we aren't going to follow this story. Well, you could follow it out and see. That there were warnings given to the one who was responsible. For guiding this ship that these prisoners were on. And they were warned not to go on that voyage, to stay at a place called fair havens. It was a place of safety.

But it didn't look comfortable. It wasn't a place that says that was commodious to winter in. It wasn't going to have all of the comforts that they desired. They knew that a little further down the shoreline. There was a much more comfortable harbor, and though the beloved apostle Paul faithfully warned them against going any further. They decided to continue on their journey to get to another location. That was more comfortable. Perhaps tonight being a Christian. Being out and out for the Lord Jesus Christ, walking with him in fellowship, knowing him, confessing him as your Savior and as your Lord. Is not a comfortable place for you in your heart of hearts. To spend as it were, the winter and you're looking for something more comfortable? Well, I tell you, out beyond the walls of this building, there are many things that look more comfortable, more convenient, more acceptable than walking the Christian path then going on a journey as a Christian saved by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that world out there has tremendous. Ports, as it were, that looked very, very nice, very, very comfortable, very, very inviting. But there is a warning going out, and it may go out ever so feebly tonight. But you hold in your lap a perfect book. With perfect warnings so that even if the ones speaking tonight. Does less than an adequate job in warning you. That book that you hold on your lap, the word of God. Has been warning you ever since you picked it up for the first time and began to read its blessed pages. Of the dangers of going on in this journey. Apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. I said earlier that the journey of life can end. Very violently. Very abruptly. It may be a long journey. It may be a short journey. But before we turn now to look at some journeys in the word of God. Let me say again, I beseech you, dear friends, sitting here tonight. To consider. You, you yourself are on a journey. And that journey will come to an end. And there's not one person in this room who. Seriously, would dare to say I know. When the journey of my life is going to end, you don't know that. Neither do I. But you do know that it will end, and if it ends apart, having been taken? Without the Lord Jesus Christ as your own personal savior. You will stand before a most incredible tribunal, as it were, a judge. Who is going to judge an absolute perfection? And there will be no hope. Dear friends. Tonight consider. And in your mind, you beloved young people who have so much. Naturally, speaking ahead of you, it seems like an almost endless Vista of life in front of you, and it seems perhaps so difficult to understand when people talk to you about the coming of the Lord Jesus. He is coming. How do I know that? Because he said that. The Lord Jesus is coming back and he said, behold, I come quickly. Those are his words. And yet you sit there with a life, as it were, considering stretching out in front of you. That seems almost endless.

And they're such a great danger. There's so much in front of you. The world tells you. There's so much to do, to experience the taste, so many things to try, so much fun to have. I tell you, there is a sign somewhere on that road. Stretching out in front of your eyes, that says the end. And you don't know if you're going to come in your journey to that sign tomorrow. Or many years down the road. I just trust tonight. That as we turn now to consider a few journeys that we have mentioned in the word of God. That the Spirit of God will work in your hearts, if there are any here. Strangers to the Lord Jesus going on a journey. With an end to stand before a holy, righteous God. As judge these prisoners. Was it 200 of them? We don't know what happened, but we do know this. Through a terrible storm, through incredible hardships, through an awful shipwreck, they still ended up evidently standing before Caesar to hear a judgment pronounced upon them for what they had done. I'm so thankful tonight. My blessed savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, has taken my judgment. That's over for me. I don't have to look forward to that. He bore my sins on Calvary's Cross Precious Blood shed to wash them away. And I don't look forward to a tribunal. I don't look forward to a judge. I look forward to meeting face to face the most wonderful friend and Lord and savior. Impossible to describe. But many of you here know exactly what I'm talking about. A friend that's walked with you faithfully, step by step, every step of your journey. And it will never leave you. That's what I'm looking forward to and maybe maybe tonight. Behold, I come quickly. When is that going to happen? I believe he said that to encourage each of those who belong to him to look for his coming momentarily. No, those of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ His Savior aren't looking to stand before a judge to answer to anything. It's been answered at a cross 2000 years ago and answered fully to God's satisfaction. He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God. God in Christ. Are you looking forward to that? If you're not, I beg you tonight, dear friend, think seriously about the end of the journey that you're on. I want to turn to Luke. We will go through these just briefly. I don't put a particular significance on the number, but we're going to look at 7 instances of journeys in the chat in the gospel by Luke. And as we look at these journeys. I want it to be understood that I'm simply going to make some applications from them. We're just going to look at the journeys and seek by the grace of God, with the help of the blessed Spirit of God, to. Make some applications that might be used to bring blessing. Two souls in this room tonight. We'll look in Luke. Chapter. 3. A little account of the Blessed Lord Jesus as a 12 year old boy. We'll start reading in verse 42. And when he was 12 years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast, when they had fulfilled the days as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and his mother knew not of it, but they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey.

And they sought him among their kinfolk. And acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking. Him. Now I want to start with this and I want to speak to those. That as one attends various prayer meetings for the Gospel. Probably the group that is, I would say, most prayed for. Children and young people sitting in this room tonight who have been brought up in a Christian home. And I'm just going to make an application of this journey to you. Here were those who thought the Lord Jesus was with them in their journey. And they were mistaken. They thought he was there. And they thought he was there because their friends, their acquaintances, their neighbors, their family was there. And they assumed that if their family was there, Jesus would be there. Perhaps that's a little like you tonight. You have Christian parents. You have Christian relatives. You may be in an assembly that's large enough that you have Christian friends and you're on your journey, assuming that you too are a Christian, that the Lord Jesus is with you in that journey because he's with the others. How many times have we heard stories of those who said that at one time or another in their life? They woke up at night, they came home unexpectedly, and those they loved and knew to be Christians knew to. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ were not to be found. And the accounts of the fear and the dread that they felt in their hearts, thinking that the Lord had come, They were mistaken. They thought Jesus was with them. But they missed him. I don't want anyone tonight in this room. To think because you've grown up in a Christian home, because you're sitting here with several hundred other Christians, because you go to the meetings and on and on and on, all of the things that in your mind you can put together to look at and say the Lord Jesus must be my Savior. I don't want you to go for one day on that journey, assuming that the Lord is your savior, if you have never really before him. Ask him to be your Lord and savior before him, believed by faith God's record, that you are a Sinner. That that forever shuts you out of the presence of a holy, righteous God. That He sent his beloved Son into this world, and that blessed One went to a cross, and there shed his precious blood. And that that blood, the blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanses us from all sin. That you will believe by faith, that record for yourself tonight, not because your parents believe it, not because your family and kinfolk believe it, but because you personally believe it for yourself. They went one day, and they found the Lord Jesus wasn't with them. May God grant. For each one in this room. That tonight you by His Grace, might be able to say. I know. I know. On the authority of the precious word of God, that the Lord Jesus Christ is my personal Savior. Let's turn over to Luke. And again, I just want to say, as we look at these various beautiful accounts, they're not the only journeys, they're not the only trips perhaps, that you'll find in Luke. And I want to say again, I'm just simply applying these in this gospel meeting. For we trust blessing. But let's look at this in. Luke Chapter 9. Verse one then he Jesus called his 12 disciples together and they gave them power and authority over all devils and to cure diseases. And he sent them to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick. Verse 3 is what I had on my heart.

And he said unto them, Take nothing for your journey, neither staves nor script, neither bread, neither money, neither have two coats apiece. That's a strange journey to take, isn't it? To go on a journey. And to take nothing. Do not have any way to support yourself on that journey, to not have the means to be able to finish that journey. But dear friends, that's exactly what God would like you to understand tonight. If you're here without Christ, nothing you can do in your life, nothing you can provide yourself in your life, can ensure that you can finish the journey. You won't be able to do it. These who were sent out by the Lord Jesus were going to go out in a conscious sense that they had nothing, and if they were going to go, they were going to act on faith. Faith, Faith alone. To go on a journey and to take no bread. One of the first things my wife and I did shortly before. We went to the airport to get on. The airplane was to go to the bank. And to get some money. We came down with I trust they won't mind if I tell a little story on them. Dan and Esther, Tony and he brought us down from the Kirkland area and I noticed they did the same thing before we left town. They stopped at a bank to get some money. We were going on a journey. And we needed some means to be able to get to the end of that journey. And to complete that journey, But my friend, you and I have no way. To provide what we need to get ourselves home, as it were, to heaven. The Lord Jesus Christ has provided everything for our journey. No money will buy that journey, no efforts will buy that will allow us to work our way through that journey. And you don't need 2 garments, you just need one, the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Clothed in that garment and that alone, by faith you will finish the journey home safe to heaven. But don't think that your money, your efforts, your character, anything about you, is going to enable you by your efforts to get home to heaven safe in the Father's house. That's something that has been provided to faith through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And faith alone can lay hold of that. Turn it over to. The 10th chapter of Luke. Perhaps one of the very best known stories in this wonderful book. The man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. This was mentioned in the Reading meeting this afternoon. We'll look at verse 33, but a certain Samaritan. As he journeyed, came where he, the wounded man was. And when he saw him, he had compassion on him. I'd like to read that in the new translation. It's beautiful. But a certain Samaritan journeying came to him. And seeing him was moved with compassion.

And came up. To him? Isn't that precious if you come up to somebody? You have to have gone lower than them. For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich. Yet for your sakes, he became poor, that ye through his poverty, might be rich. I want to ask you. Do you think you'll ever find anyone who so loved you? Had such compassion and concern for your condition that has gone lower than the Blessed Lord Jesus who went down into death, even the death of the cross.

There in Jonah the Prophet, he went down to the bottoms of the mountains, the weeds. Were wrapped about his head. Blessed Lord Jesus on the cross, that crown of thorns wrapped on his head. Why was it there? Do you think you had anything to do? With that crown that he wore. It wasn't there because he deserved it. Blessed Savior, compassion. He saw that man. He saw you wounded and needy. You think you're going on a journey. You think you can make it alone in this life. I want to be careful with the word of God. I expect this man didn't get halfway. Between between Jerusalem and Jericho before he was lying wounded. In a ditch. Had beloved young people you know very well. As you look around. At those you work with, those you go to school with. Those you read about, you know very well that it doesn't take long in this life to be terribly wounded and left half dead. But I want to tell you, there's a despised outcast. In the eyes of this world Samaritan, I say that reverently. Who is on a journey? And tonight I would like to make that very personal for you. He's on a journey for you personally. And he's looking, and he sees you, and he has come down ever so low. No man could ever go lower than the Blessed Lord Jesus. And he's done that in his love and his compassion for you that he might bring you. To that place of rest, the end. What are you going to do? What do you suppose that wounded man did? After those others, the Levite, the priests, whoever they were, whatever their excuses. Pass by. Do you suppose that he was conscious enough to be able? In the dimness of his wounded vision, to see people walking by. What do you think it meant to him when he saw a form come over to him and lean over? And come down to where he was and minister to him. Do you think? He shrugged his shoulders. Acted unconcerned. Acted as though it didn't matter. Acted as though tomorrow would be fine to be taken care of. I don't believe it for a minute. How are you acting tonight as this blessed? Man, this Samaritan, as it were, leans over in compassion, having come up. To where you are. Out of the depths of that horrible cross. That he might pour in oil and wine. And bring you to a place of rest. What are you going to do with that tonight? Are you going to say no to him? Oh dear friend. He's not going to make a second journey. He's gone through this world. He's passing through now. And you know, I say carefully. That journey will come to an end, too. When the day of grace is over, this blessed Samaritan, the Son of God. Is making no more journeys through this world. For those who tonight are sitting here and may be rejecting. His offer of care and love and grace. Let's look at Luke Chapter 11. And verse 5. And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go on to him at midnight, and shall say unto him, Friend, lend ME3 loaves. For a friend of mine is in his journey, In his journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him. You know, when we began tonight, I spoke about those who have grown up in Christian homes. Who may be thinking that the Lord is with them because he's with their family. Now I want to speak and I don't know. As I lookout over the audience tonight, I have no way to know.

If there are any here who are visiting. If you are, we're so glad you're here. And you've come, And if you come here tonight, not sure or without the Lord Jesus Christ. As your personal savior, you are in desperate need of bread. And I would like to be the friend that you have come to. Asking for bread. But I have a problem. I can't give you that bread. But I have a wonderful friend. That has bread for you, the Lord Jesus Christ. What a precious friend. And tonight, even now and before this meeting. And I enjoyed that thought that was expressed here, that for weeks prayers being going up ascending to this friend, a friend who sticketh closer than a brother. That tonight the need that you have in your journey, the need of bread. Might be met, the Lord Jesus could say that he was the bread come down from heaven, that a man might eat of him and live. And tonight I want to tell you, dear friend, if you've come into this hall. You too are on a journey, but if you have come in a stranger to the blessed Lord Jesus Christ not able to say. He's my friend. He's my Lord. He's my savior. If you can't say that tonight. Would you allow me to go to my friend, the best friend I've ever had or ever will have? And beg him for bread to give to you. On your journey. Would you tonight, simply by faith, say, Lord Jesus, I want thee. As my Lord and my Savior. What a satisfying bread that would be. You're on a journey. You have no bread if you have not the Lord Jesus Christ. As your Savior, He is here tonight offering himself to you, and all you need to do is reach out and take by faith that bread for your journey. Luke, Chapter 13. This is Speaking of the Lord Jesus. Verse 22 of Luke chapter 13 and he Jesus. Went through the cities and villages, teaching and journeying toward. Jerusalem. You know, the journey that we came on as we were kindly brought down here from Kirkland was a very pleasant journey. We got to see what I, coming from the Midwest considered to be an absolutely incredible. An awesome sight. The sun was shining in a clear sky as we went up through one of the passes. I'd forgotten the name of it now many of you probably know, but one of the passes over Mount Rainier. And the view, the incredible grandeur and majesty of that trip was beyond my ability to describe. It was a very pleasant journey. Taken in the company of loved ones who saw to our care and made sure that we were comfortable. What a nice journey. Do you think that's the journey that the Lord Jesus had as he went to Jerusalem? I knew that when we got here, should the Lord leave us here, I would meet. Those that I've never met before, I would be reacquainted with those that we have met in the past. And we be with those who love and love the blessed Lord Jesus. Those who I call my brothers and sisters, those who have shown love and care for me. And so I could look forward to the end of a very, very pleasant journey.

Do you think the Lord Jesus looked forward to a pleasant end in Jerusalem? He, being wearied with his journey, sat on a well. Did you ever think what it meant to the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ as he walked through this world? A world that he had created in perfection. And saw it spoiled by sin, the misery. The unhappiness, the violence, the corruption. He was wearied with his journey and he full well knew what awaited him. At Jerusalem, it was not going to be a welcome of joy and love and open arms. And happiness. It was going to be a welcome of spitting and shame. Blessed Lord Jesus. And he knew every stroke that was going to fall on his blessed back. He knew the individual of everyone who struck him in the face. And said prophesied out Christ. He knew everything and he knew more than that. He knew what it meant. That he was going to go to the cross and be forsaken of his God. Perfect, Holy, spotless man. That was the journey he took. And he took that tonight, beloved friend. So that the journey you're on might and enjoy and bliss and happiness in the Father's house. Rather than a lost eternity in the lake of fire. Prepared for the devil and his angels. Let's look look at. Luke, Chapter 15. Again, a story very well known will just read one verse, verse 13. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together and took. His journey into a far country. And there wasted his substance with riotous living. There is the absolute opposite. Of the blessed Lord Jesus who took his journey to Jerusalem, he took that journey. In absolute selflessness. Set aside all that he might claim as a perfect man. And accomplish the father's will. Here is what you and I by nature are taking everything. By nature I say everything that we can get to waste it on ourselves. I look around this room tonight and I see a group of young people. It's a tremendous joy and encouragement. You look. Wonderful. This young man looked wonderful as he began this journey. And he began it with a very, very fat pocket book. He began it with every advantage that money and position. Could give him. He looked to the eye. Great. How do you think? He looked a short time later in the pig pen. So hungry that he would have taken one of those filthy husks that the pigs were eating. He a Jew. Swine the unclean Anne, one of the unclean animals to the Jew. And yet he would have filled his belly with the food that that unclean animal ate. You think he looked good then? All beloved young people, be careful. Be careful

what you're hearing the world tell you tonight. Be careful of the bill of goods that the world is trying to sell you, to tell you to go out and live it up. There's a saying.

In an ad from a very well known athletic shoe company, it goes something like this. Life is short. Play hard. Well, half of that ad is very true. Life is short. The journey is short. The other half is an absolute lie. Of the enemy of your soul, it should have said, Pray hard. Life is short. Pray hard. This young man found how short that journey could be. By the grace of God, he was brought back. Do you want to end up down in a pig pen before you finally come to your senses and turn around and come back? Wouldn't it be easier tonight to simply in your heart say blessed Lord Jesus? I don't want what is mine, I want to have what is mine. That thou art offering me eternal life. And save yourself that trip down to the pig pen. In closing. I'm going to. Change the character a bit. Of the Gospel Meeting. And we're going to look at one more instance. Of people on a journey. Trust that this is. Of the Lord turn to Luke 24. And verse 13. And behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem, About 3 score furlongs, and they talked together of all these things which had happened. Well, here's the 7th journey, though it doesn't use that word that I'd like to close with tonight. These were believers. I rather suspect I'm speaking to a large majority tonight of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. But I would like to speak to the hearts of the young believers, if I may be allowed for a moment. And perhaps all of us too, a time came when there was a great discouragement that came in to these two believers lives. They had believed in the Messiah they had. Believed that he was the one sent that was going to restore Israel to its place of greatness and glory. Were they wrong in believing that? No, he's going to do that. But it didn't happen in the way that they thought, and it didn't happen when they thought it ought to happen. And Jerusalem instead of through their eyes by faith being God's center and remaining there in spite of what? Outwardly had taken place. They get discouraged and they go on a journey to Emmaus. I want to be careful about attaching meanings to words. Those who are far more capable of that kind of study may. Have a different meaning, but at least in some sources that I looked, Emmaus means something like. Warm Springs or Hot Springs? It probably looked it was their home and it probably looked like a good alternative to staying in Jerusalem, where everything was cold. And bleak because that one they had trusted in. Had been crucified. All of their hopes and dreams had come to a smashing end. And now they decided to go on a journey to get where their discouragement could be eased a bit in the Warm Springs. Have you ever been discouraged? I have. And sometimes we look around and we look for a place that seems like it's going to be more comfortable, more pleasant, because whether it's the assembly or our home or our particular job, whatever it is, it didn't work out. It wasn't what we thought it was going to be.

And we get discouraged. The Lord didn't seem to act the way we had trusted. That he was going to act in our behalf. Beloved young people, you have, I know, hopes and dreams if the Lord leaves us here. And perhaps they don't come true in just the way that you desire that they would. You trust in the Lord. You know the Lord is with you. He loves you. He wants to bless you. But your prayers and your earnest desires aren't being answered in the way that you wanted them to be answered. Don't go to the Hot Springs. But these did, and we all do. Sometimes in our lives we get discouraged and we go down to Emmaus, as it were. But this is so precious. Jesus himself. Jesus himself, did he know about their discouragement? Did he know about their journey? Yes, he did. Does he know about that discouragement in your heart and in life, your life? Just remember, dear friend, beloved young person, Jesus himself. Knows about you and he's interested in you and he loves you. And it's not only that Jesus himself knows and is interested in you and loves you. But it says drew near and went with them. Isn't that precious? In the times when we're discouraged on our journeys. To be able to look by faith and say blessed Lord Jesus. Thou art with me now. The Lord Jesus, I say reverently, wasn't satisfied that they would stay there. But he went with them in grace and love and warmed their hearts, revealed himself to them. And then he was gone, and they had to go back to the place they left to find him again. And they did. All dear friends. What a Savior, what a Lord we have who even in our discouragement in such grace, condescending love and grace. Would walk with us. By US Jesus himself. Talk to us, stir our hearts and warm our hearts. Did not our hearts burn within us? While he walked with us and talked with us by the way, and then reveal himself. To them that they might go back to the place where he wanted them to be. Well, dear friends, there's the journeys. Where's your journey going to end tonight? It may end tonight. I will say one more time. The journey you're on. The journey. Every single individual in this room is on the journey of life. Will without exception come. To an end. Where will your end be standing as it were before Caesar, to answer for your sins? Or there in the Father.

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31-32. "Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off."

How important that principles given in God's Word to guide our lives not be abandoned. If the sailors did not stay in the ship, it was doomed. If we do not hold the precious truths of God, our Christian life (though never eternally lost) and our testimony will come to ruin (2 Tim. 1:13).

33. "And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing."

Fourteen days is a long time to go without eating. Weakness, weariness and wasting can easily overcome a soul. That "day of all days" when Christ returns is about to dawn. Let us "feed" on Him daily that faith not be weakened, hope not be wearied, and divine love not be allowed to waste away.

34. "Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not a hair fall from the head of any of you."

We are to "desire the sincere milk of the word" as "newborn babes," and we are also to grow into spiritual maturity so that we can feed on "strong meat." Going through life without feeding and meditating on the Word of God denies both to those who are so precious to Christ that the "very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matt. 10:30; Luke 12:7).

35. "And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat."

In times of distress, nothing is more important than seeing an example of faith. Words, even of edification, exhortation and comfort, are ineffective if not accompanied by a living example in the one who speaks. The Lord Jesus left us an example (1 Peter 2:21) and we are to be an example (1 Tim. 4:12). Do we feed on and follow God's Word?

36. "Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat."

What positive, happy results come of the beloved Apostle's words and example! "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine" (Prov. 17:22). Do we want others to joyfully feed on Christ? Are we doing that?

37. "And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls."

How can any comfort be found in "numbers" gathered together if they are sad, sick and succumbing to hopeless despair? Each one of those the Lord Jesus died to bring together in oneness with the Father and Himself (John 17:11) is individually important, and He desires our joy. "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11).

38. "And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea."

"Eaten enough"? Can we ever have enough of Christ? How often a beloved brother used to remind many of us that "you can have as much of Christ as you want, and your life shows how much you want." Let us never "lighten the ship" let us never "cast out the wheat into the sea" let us never give up precious truth "as the truth is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21).

39. "And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship."

Paul had earlier told them that no one on board would lose his life, but there would be loss of the ship. Though all he told them proved true, they still determined to "save" the ship by running it aground in a "bay" (JND) on a strand of shoreline.

40. "And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore."

The storm-tossed ship was left to the mercy of the sea and wind. Those responsible for control of the ship had refused the Apostle's warning (vss. 9-11). Now their efforts to direct and control have become useless. Proverbs 29:15 warns of allowing a child to act in self-will while Galatians 6:7 warns all of the "reaping" ("consequences") from what is sown in our lives.

41-42. "And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmovable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves. And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape."

How often in storms caused by self-will, two opposing opinions cause those on a common course to run aground. Opposing views then begin to clash, causing "leaders" to become entrenched in their positions, rather than remaining united. The result is a smashing to pieces by the sea's violence.

"The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Cor. 3:6). One may be absolutely right and still cause destruction because of a demanding spirit of legality which, being stuck fast, will not move.

What a beautiful example and that in divinely perfect balance is seen in our precious Saviour. "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). If in the midst of severe conflicts the truth is held in a gracious spirit rather than the demanding spirit of legality, how much devastation might be averted? May we ever hold fast "as the truth is in Jesus," for only in this way can we weather life's storms.

43. "But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land."

The soldiers had no thought of showing grace—they were going to kill all the prisoners (even though some might have been proven innocent if allowed to stand before Cæsar's tribunal). The centurion's respect for Paul saved the lives of all on board the ship. Respect for and obedience to Paul's doctrine always results in spiritual life and liberty.

44. "And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land."

Perhaps some of the pieces of the wreckage were large enough to allow several who were unable to swim to get safely to shore together, while others swam or floated there alone. But they all escaped safe to land. Every believer will get home safe to the Father's house (John 10:28-29). Though sad that all believers are not at present publicly united as one, may we always, whenever possible, "follow righteousness, faith, charity [and] peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22).

Ed.

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19. "And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship."

The fifth thing the mariners lost was the “tackling” (rendered in the JND translation as “furniture”). These are things necessary to make the ship habitable and usable. Perhaps we can think of the “furniture” as part of the foundation of the assembly: “And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone.” We find a very sobering question asked in Psalm 11:3: “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” Let us take care not to give up or throw out the apostles’ doctrine vital and foundational for the church of God.

20. “And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.”

The sixth thing their self-will and refusal to hear Paul caused them to lose was “light” (to see during the day and to navigate by stars at night) for guidance. The seventh thing they lose is “all hope” the most solemn loss of all. Each saved soul knows in some measure the sense of hopelessness that they felt when convicted by the Spirit of their sins. If resting on our own works and efforts, it is quickly apparent there is no hope. Further, as Christians, if we give up the directions of the Word of God, refusing to heed its warnings, we too will eventually end up in a storm of life so severe that all hope of salvation from the problem may be lost.

21. “But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss.”

Paul had been left out of the mariners’ thoughts for a long time. Is his doctrine left out of our thoughts and ways today a day when “all they which are in Asia be turned away from me.” Professing Christianity does not want to listen to Paul, has abandoned him, and is suffering through awful storms of destruction as a result.

Thinking to have “gained” a comfortable port for the winter, they instead “gained... harm and loss.” Oh! may we heed Paul’s doctrine (teaching) that we not have to experience such sorrow!

22. “And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship.”

Paul, who described himself as an “insolent overbearing man” (1 Tim. 1:13 JnD), now speaks in the gracious spirit of Christ. Instead of angry rebuke, he encourages those on board to be of good cheer. His answer is full of grace and truth “no loss of any man’s life” (grace) and “but of the ship” (truth). May our lives be a continual proof of the grace and truth we have received from our blessed God.

23. “For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve.”

Only the Lord can and will stand by a child of God in life’s storms. Paul belonged to Christ, and Christ stood with him (by angelic means). He has promised us that “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

24. “Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.”

When in the midst of seemingly hopeless circumstances, only the Lord can truly speak those precious words, “Fear not.” This world is a scene full of despair and hopeless fear. How wonderful, in such a scene, to hear His blessed “soft gentle voice” (1 Kings 19:12 JnD) speaking to us in times of stormy trial.

We also find here a vitally important promise for believers: “God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.” If we want to enjoy a happy and full Christian life, it is vital to sail with Paul. He had to say, “All they which are in Asia be turned away from me.” Later, the most doctrinally blessed assembly (Ephesus in Asia) is solemnly warned that its candlestick of testimony is about to be removed (Rev. 2:5). What solemn results for refusing to stay with Paul!

25. “Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.”

Around them all was dark amid the fury of the storm. Nothing they could see with their natural eyes would encourage those on board ship to “be of good cheer.” One thing alone can strengthen in life’s storms God’s Word. “I believe God” is the sole key to peace and comfort when all seems hopeless.

26-27. “Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island. But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country.”

There come yet more tests for faith. Paul had said, “Be of good cheer: for I believe God” yet the storm’s fury did not immediately abate, nor did they immediately gain the safety of land. Judging by natural appearances, nothing Paul said would give comfort but faith provides comfort by believing God. Midnight is the darkest part of the night, and it was in that darkness that the light of hope finally began to shine—“they drew near to some country.”

28. “And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms.”

In a violent storm during the darkest part of the night, it was evident they were nearing shore. So for believers though enduring violent storms in the path of faith during a time of gross spiritual darkness, such things are but signs proving that we too are drawing nearer our heavenly shore (Heb. 10:37).

29. “Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.”

Those on board the ship, fearing the savage storm at sea, now fear the rocks as they near the safety of land. “Four anchors” were their only hope while awaiting the morning. Christians also have “four anchors” of preservation as we await that wonderful dawn about to be ushered in by the return of our Lord Jesus Christ for His church.

We find them in Jude 20-21: "Ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (1) building on holy faith rather than fleshly fear, (2) praying in the Spirit, (3) keeping ourselves in God's love, and, (4) looking for the sure return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

30. "And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under color as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship."

Men have developed many religious philosophies meant to guide, stabilize and comfort in life's storms. But those very storms prove their utter worthlessness—"vanity of vanities." Pretending to help, the sailors, thinking only of themselves, try to abandon the ship. What sweet comfort to rest in our Lord Jesus, who has promised to never leave or forsake His own in balmy days or stormy nights.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2004, Practical Reflections on Acts - Acts 27:7-18 (27:7-18)

7. "And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone."

Six times wind is mentioned in the account of Paul's voyage to Rome (vss. 4,7,13,14,15,40). Every time, save one, it proved a hindrance to their progress, while in verse 13 its gentleness lulled the sailors into a false sense of security. How much better to go through life trusting the One who controls the wind, rather than the wind itself. "He commandeth even the winds... and they obey Him" (Luke 8:25). "Fire, and hail; snow, and vapor; stormy wind fulfilling His word" (Psa. 148:8).

8. "And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called the Fair Havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea."

God, sovereignly using contrary winds, brings the ship to a place of safety—The Fair Havens—a site near a city where all their needs could be supplied. He has lovingly given guidance in His precious Word showing believers moral havens where they can anchor meant to protect from the violent storms of life the assembly, marriage, home and, above all, a "Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. "

9. "Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them."

The first words spoken by the Apostle in Acts 27 (as recorded by the Spirit) are words of warning. Are we willing to heed the warnings God sends through His Word, His servants, and even the circumstances He allows? The voyage of life is fraught with dangers. May we soberly heed God's warnings.

10. "And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives."

Eager to set out on their journey, Paul's solemn warning to the shipmen carried no weight with them. Perhaps they made the fatal error of judging according to the appearance, for Paul's "bodily presence [was] weak, and his speech contemptible" (2 Cor. 10:10). May we not become so occupied with God's messenger that we miss God's message.

11. "Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul."

Power (master) and wealth (owner) are valued by those in authority (centurion), for the "natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him" (1 Cor. 2:14). Paul presented no appearance of power or authority to the natural eye, yet he spoke the mind of God. Are we willing, by faith, to believe God's Word, or are we moved by sight?

12. "And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is a haven of Crete, and lieth toward the southwest and northwest."

We now are presented with a fourth thing that persuades the mind of men, along with power, wealth and authority popular opinion.

The "majority" did not like the conditions of the Fair Havens there evidently was not enough there which outwardly gave promise of satisfaction during the coming, long, cold winter. So it is with the things of God. To the natural heart, there is not to be found in company with Paul at "Fair Havens" that which warms and satisfies its empty void. Thus the "majority" rules and the ship leaves the safety of the harbor.

13. "And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete."

Circumstances are a poor guide in following God's will. The south wind, pleasant, soft and gentle, seemed to prove they were right in rejecting Paul's warning. Sailing close to Crete apparently soothed any who may have had troubled consciences.

A dear brother used to say, "No one leaves the Lord's presence at right angles." The path of self-will for a Christian may at first seem quite safe, for it does not move very far from the truth or from God's Word—staying close to land. Present circumstances (the south wind) are allowed to confirm the path as an acceptable one. How subtly the little foxes bring ruin to a happy and obedient walk with God!

14. "But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon."

It did not take long for the circumstances they had formerly trusted as a positive sign in their rejection of Paul's warning to disappear in a sudden and unexpected raging storm. The wind they now encountered was not a soft, gentle south wind helping them on their way, but a

violent tempest blowing against them. "He that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and without remedy" (Prov. 29:1 JnD). Our blessed God loves His children far too much to allow them to continue happily and peacefully in self-will.

15. "And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive."

Having assumed they were in control of the ship, the mariners now begin the dreadfully painful process of "losing" everything they had thought to have gained. The first thing they lost was the control they had taken by disregarding Paul's warning. A self-willed believer is, at first, quite sure of being in control and all being well. But sooner or later the realization comes that control is lost.

When he had been seduced by Delilah into revealing the source of his strength, Samson's first words, when "he awoke out of his sleep," were, "I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him" (Judg. 16:20). Self-will caused Samson to lose the Lord's presence, his discernment, his strength, his sight and finally his liberty. What an awful price to pay!

16. "And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat."

They could have been resting quietly and safely at Fair Havens rather than frantically working to save their ship in the midst of the savage tempest. The path of self-will and rejection of the Word of God brings hard work rather than the "still waters" and "green pastures" to which the Good Shepherd leads His sheep to rest.

17. "Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven."

They first lost "control" (vs. 15), then they lost "rest" (vs. 16), and now they lose "confidence." The mariners well knew they were being driven towards an inevitable and fatal destruction the quicksands of the North African coast. Having lowered the sail, they were "driven." How sad when a self-willed soul finds itself being driven against its will, unable to do anything except fear the seemingly inevitable approaching destruction. May we daily heed the blessed Lord's tender words, "Follow thou Me."

18. "And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship."

The fourth thing lost was the valuable cargo which the ship carried along with its prisoners. How much that is precious and valuable is lost when self-will brings its violent storms into Christian lives! The Lord desires an abundant entrance for each of His own. Self-will brings spiritual poverty instead.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2004, Practical Reflections on Acts - Acts 26:25-27:6 (26:25-32)

25. "But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness."

Paul's reply is a lovely example of the meek and gentle spirit of Christ we ought to covet: "The servant of the Lord must not strive" (2 Tim. 2:24). Festus was morally very far from being noble, but the Apostle honors the position he held. In a world that is "not afraid to speak evil of dignities" (2 Peter 2:10), let us honor that "worthy name by the which" we are called (James 2:7) by always giving "honor to whom honor" is due (Rom. 13:7).

26. "For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner."

Men might despise, discount and disbelieve the truth Paul preached concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, His death and His resurrection. But Christianity the truth has nothing to hide or cover. Festus was well aware of the facts concerning the Christian faith. But this only made him the more responsible for his rejection of its truth. Let us live our lives "in the open," not seeking to hide or cover anything.

27. "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest."

What a solemn and vast difference between "head" belief and "heart" belief the difference between eternal bliss and eternal condemnation!

28. "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

The king's reply to Paul was not spoken in seriousness by one feeling the need of turning to Christ. No doubt the satirical jest was his attempt to ease a troubled conscience. The human heart often tries to mock at or laugh away the Spirit's striving. Believers should never display a "light" or "unsober" spirit concerning the precious Word of God.

29. "And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds."

Paul's answer flows from divine love and the wisdom which comes only from above (James 3:17). What a beautiful example of the joy and satisfaction that Christ alone brings. The Apostle's heart, overflowing with love, earnestly desired that these proud rulers who scoffed at the truth and ridiculed him might enjoy all that he enjoyed in Christ, save for the chains that bound him as prisoner. His expression was no vain attempt to curry their favor it came from a heart constrained by the love of Christ (2 Cor. 5:14). Do we, who have been so freely blessed (Rom. 8:32), desire that others enjoy what we have? Do we daily enjoy what we have in the Lord Jesus?

30. "And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them."

A most solemn moment for the proud monarch and his companions! The publican, convicted before God of his sin, would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven (Luke 18:13), but these, who had sat together hearing Paul, rise up to discuss his fate. Little did they realize that the "word of truth" Paul had spoken would judge them in a coming day when "every knee shall bow" to the One of whom the Apostle testified.

31-32. "And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cæsar."

Though knowing he was innocent, they missed the moral impact of Paul's words. Paul had spoken to their heart and conscience, but, as they "talked between themselves," they do not seem to have heard or understood the Spirit's message using the Apostle.

In spite of their solemn rejection, Agrippa speaks the truth concerning the beloved Apostle had he not appealed to Cæsar, he might have once again enjoyed liberty. How often we morally appeal to Cæsar (looking to this world for help and sustenance) and, in doing so, are taken captive by it while losing the enjoyment of the "glorious liberty" which is ours as "children of God."

Chapter 27

1. "And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band."

Though Paul is included among those prisoners being taken to Rome, he was not only the Lord's beloved prisoner servant but also "the Lord's freedman" (1 Cor. 7:22 Jnd). The Spirit inspired the Apostle to call himself the Lord's prisoner, but he was never a prisoner of man, though man put him in prison. Whatever circumstances we as believers find ourselves in, we have the indwelling of the Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13) and "there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17).

2. "And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us."

Does it matter to our blessed God and Father if even one of His children seeks to walk in fellowship with Paul's doctrine to be, as it were, found "with Paul" and his company? The Spirit's mention of dear Aristarchus as being with us clearly shows our God's approval and delight in such personal faithfulness.

3. "And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself."

We are commanded by our blessed Lord to "love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12). But not every believer in Christ can refresh as a friend. "Phygellus and Hermogenes" (2 Tim. 1:15) were two of many believers in Asia who turned away from Paul, rather than refreshing him. "Demas hath forsaken me" (2 Tim. 4:10) because of his love for the present world. How good when "being let go" we can find our company with those of "like precious faith," friends with whom we enjoy mutual refreshment.

4. "And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary."

The winds controlled the ship's movements. May we be deeply exercised about what controls our lives as Christians the winds of human opinion, or the Word and will of our blessed God?

5-6. "And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein."

Though we might wonder why the Spirit has recorded these details, it illustrates a vital, practical principle. We do not know the path that lies ahead in life but He does. God declares "the end from the beginning... the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure" (Isa. 46:10). Paul was going to Rome; how he was to get there was all God's work.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2004, Practical Reflections on Acts - Acts 26:13-24 (26:13-24)

13. "At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me."

Nothing in nature is brighter or more glorious than the noonday sun. But there is a glory infinitely above that the glory of the One who created that sun. When truly in His presence, the most brilliant thing in nature fades to insignificance. "God who spoke that out of darkness light should shine who has shone in our hearts for the shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6 Jnd). We will soon see and be with Him in that glory (John 17:24), while, for now, faith sees Him "crowned with glory" (Heb. 2:9). May we daily live in the light of that indescribable glory!

14. "And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

All fell to the earth, but only Saul (Paul) understood the voice. It called his name, asking him a question which showed that there was One who perfectly knew his heart and conscience and thus forever changed that proud Pharisee's life. May we every day hear our glorified Lord's voice as He desires to speak to each an individual, vitally important message. He sees, He knows, He loves, He cares, and He delivers (Ex. 2:23-25; 3:7-10)! Let us listen!

15. "And I said, Who art Thou, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

Any spirit of arrogance that had characterized Saul as an "insolent, overbearing man" (1 Tim. 1:13 JnD) disappeared when Saul said, "Lord." He didn't know who spoke, but he was well aware of being in the presence of One infinitely his superior. What a shock to learn that the very name he so hated was the One now speaking to him from heaven's glory. Bowing to the Lordship of Christ is the first step in knowing Him and His will for our lives.

16. "But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee."

"Rise, and stand" something that sinners are incapable of doing before God. When He stops a sinner, saves him from destruction, and gives him a ministry (service) to carry out, the Lord also gives the needed ability and strength. We don't know all the path of service the Lord has marked out for each, but we do know that He will appear day by day to give the needed wisdom for such service.

17. "Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee."

We have a God of deliverance delivering us from a lost eternity, delivering us from a lost life, delivering us from lost victory over the enemy's attacks. May we always move in confidence that such a God who is for us will be with us in whatever pathway of life and service He determines best to direct us.

18. "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me."

Sight, light, strength, forgiveness and treasure found in Jesus Christ is not such blessing infinitely worthy of being eagerly shared with the lost?

19. "Wherupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision."

May we not say that every time we open the precious Word of God we can receive that which answers to a "heavenly vision" a direct communication to our souls from our blessed, glorified Lord? Oh! that we may more eagerly read His precious Word daily, seeking to hear Him speak to our heart!

20. "But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."

It's not enough to say "I repent." Suitable action must accompany true repentance. The first son, when asked to work in his Father's vineyard, said, "I will not." But "afterward he repented, and went" his actions thus confirming the reality of his repentance. The second son said, "I go... and went not" his actions confirming the worthlessness of his words (Matt. 21:28-30). Actions born of true repentance come from turning to God.

21. "For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me."

The servant (Paul) finds the same treatment as his blessed Master received: "Mine enemies chased me sore, like a bird, without cause" (Lam. 3:52). We do not live in a world (or even in a society) marked by "upright judgment." Man's heart is by nature incurably wicked and proved itself so when he willingly condemned to death "without cause" the only perfect Man who lived. In the face of such blind hatred of the name of Christ, let us lovingly live faithfully for Him, no matter what the cost.

22. "Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come."

Our blessed God is ever ready to help the helpless who cry to Him. When the Syrophenician woman said, "Lord, help," God healed her daughter (Matt. 15:25). When the grieving father cried out, "Lord... help," God healed his son (Mark 9:24). He will give each the needed help and strength to carry out His will. "I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand.... I will help thee" (Isa. 41:13).

23. "That Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles."

We have hope and help because our blessed Lord suffered, died and rose victorious over death and the grave. The blind have received sight let us walk in the light and be light bearers to those who sit in the region and shadow of death (Matt. 4:16). "Let your light so shine before men" (Matt. 5:16).

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

When the truth of God is presented, the enemy often seeks to make a loud noise to shut it out of men's minds. We live in a world of noise music, video, sports, all manner of chaotic activity often used of the enemy to shut out the tender, gentle voice of the Spirit of God (1 Kings 19:12 JnD). May our living testimony for Christ be loud enough that it can be heard above all the enemy's noise!

26-27. "Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him."

Here we find the idolatrous world, because of its spiritual darkness, in a quandary as to Paul. Festus had to admit there was no crime with which he could charge the Apostle. Yet even though in spiritual darkness, he recognized that keeping a man prisoner who had committed no crime was unjustifiable. Let us not be quick to judge or to fall into the trap of accepting accusations against others (which may be nothing more than unfounded gossip) until they are allowed to give answer for themselves.

Chapter 26

1-2. "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself: I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews."

How spiritually blind are the "princes of this age" (1 Cor. 2:8 JND)! King Agrippa little realized that the one he arrogantly permitted to speak for himself was a "chosen vessel" of the Lord Jesus selected by Him to be "a minister, according to the dispensation of God... to fulfill the word of God" (Col. 1:25).

Yet, in lovely humility, the beloved Apostle, who walked in communion with God and had a clear conscience, could think himself happy when called to answer false charges that might mean his death. May we never fear the consequences of living faithfully for Christ in this world, always being ready to give an answer concerning our faith (1 Peter 3:15).

3. "Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently."

Paul was not using vain flattery to gain the goodwill of King Agrippa. The king, being from the line of the Herods, was indeed well acquainted with Jewish religious customs, though he used them, not for the purpose of honoring God, but to gain political favor with the Jews. Similarly there is a danger that the precious truths of God graciously given to us, if not walked in, may become spiritually nothing more than customs or questions. The joy and delight of our hearts ought to be "as the truth is in Jesus," practically (and in love) forming and guiding our daily walk.

4. "My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews."

What a happy thing if we can speak with some assurance (though never with pride) that the example of our lives (including children and young people) commends us to those who are our enemies for Christ's sake (Titus 2:7-8). How important to live openly and without guile in this dark world.

5. "Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee."

Paul said "if they would testify," but these blinded religious leaders who knew he spoke the truth were purposely silent. Yet the law of Moses, of which they were so proud, warned against false witness (Ex. 20:16). It is possible for believers, if walking after the flesh, to act in this shameful way too. Ephesus had received the highest Christian truth, yet the believers were warned to put "away lying" and "speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another" (Eph. 4:25).

6-7. "And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews."

Paul's heart embraced all twelve tribes his love going beyond Judah and Jerusalem encompassed the whole nation of Israel even though the Jews hated the truth and its minister. Does our heart in love desire blessing for the whole church the assembly that Christ loved and gave Himself for?

8. "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?"

Jesus, the One who told the Jews that "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living," was now Himself risen from the dead and glorified at the Father's right hand (1 Cor. 15:18; Mark 16:19). The Lord Jesus also has assured us that "because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19). To faith, resurrection life is a wonderful, assured reality, but to the unbelieving mind it seems an incredible impossibility.

9. "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth."

The mind, no matter how religious or intelligent, when reasoning according to the flesh rather than by faith as guided by the Spirit, always leads to doing "things contrary to the name of Jesus" (Acts 26:9).

10-11. "Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to

blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities."

"Shut up," "put to death," "punished them," "compelled them to blaspheme," "persecuted them"—what awful fruit from man's religious efforts! May our lives produce the "fruit of the Spirit."

12. "Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests."

How different the "power" (JND) given by those spiritually blind religious leaders from that divine power given by the Lord Jesus from glory with a light that blinded Saul's natural sight. Natural sight can never view the glory where He dwells, nor can it give the power needed to walk in its light by faith. "When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only" (Matt. 17:8).

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2004, Practical Reflections on Acts - Acts 25:12-25 (25:12-25)

12. "Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Cæsar? unto Cæsar shalt thou go."

Though we do not criticize the beloved Apostle Paul, would not it have been better to appeal to the Lord? Christians, living in Western lands especially, may do the same looking to worldly authority to set things right in our lives. May we know more of the spirit of the psalmist: "I lift up mine eyes unto the mountains: whence shall my help come? My help cometh from Jehovah, who made the heavens and the earth" (Psa. 121:12 JnD).

13-14. "And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Cæsarea to salute Festus. And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix."

The world indulges its pomp and glory. Ruler salutes ruler many days while a servant of the true King is left a virtually forgotten prisoner. May we faithfully and willingly serve Him until that glorious day when our blessed Lord will be owned as "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (Rev. 19:16). Many days have passed since our blessed Lord's rejection and death, but the eternal day of His glory is about to begin. Then "we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

15-16. "About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him. To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have license to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him."

How humbling to see an idolatrous Gentile power act with more uprightness than those who claimed to be God's chosen earthly people. Jehovah had commanded them to guard carefully against false accusations. "Diligent inquisition" was to be made before any judgment was passed (Deut. 19:16-20). But in the Apostle Paul's case, the Jews desired (as a political favor) that he be put to death, disregarding God's Word. It was such blatant wickedness as this which caused the Gentiles to blaspheme the true God whom the Jews professed to worship (see Rom. 2:17-24). May we believers be deeply exercised that our daily walk not give cause to the world for dishonoring or blaspheming the "worthy name by the which ye are called" (James 2:7).

17. "Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth."

Festus evidently had no thought or concern that there is coming a day when he who sat in such arrogant judgment on an apostle of Jesus Christ will himself stand before an infinitely more glorious seat of judgment there to be judged according to divine holiness and righteousness. Let us live in view of the judgment seat of Christ where all will be divinely evaluated by Himself (see Rom. 14:10-13).

18. "Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed."

Those Jewish accusers who stood up against Paul will eventually bow the knee before the One whom the Apostle served so faithfully. Those who love and serve the Lord must likewise be content to be hated and falsely accused by religious men and misunderstood by the world. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).

19. "But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive."

"Superstition" is better rendered "system of worship" (JND). Though he did not realize it, Festus's words were an accurate description of the Jew's religion. Having rejected and condemned their Messiah sent of God, the guilty nation was left with a mere empty, outward religious "system" one which God has, during the day of grace, set aside. But for believers, the wonderful reality is that our blessed Saviour is alive, risen and seated in glory. May our actions and words also affirm this blessed truth.

20. "And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters."

Festus realized that he had no understanding or ability to question Paul concerning these spiritual matters and thus gave Paul a choice. But the beloved Apostle acted according to his own will in refusing to go to Jerusalem. How precious to think of our Lord Jesus, who, as perfect Man, said to His Father at Gethsemane, "Not My will, but Thine be done." Let us ever seek to be found walking according to that "good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

21. "But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Cæsar."

Appeals to the world for righteous judgment concerning difficulties in the path of faith result in loss of the liberty that is ours as "children of God" (JND). Paul himself asked the Corinthian believers, "Why do ye not rather suffer wrong?" rebuking them for going to the world to set wrongs right (1 Cor. 6:68 JND). The Lord Jesus "committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). Let us do likewise.

22-23. "Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. Tomorrow, said he, thou shalt hear him. And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth."

What a worthless display of this world's fleeting pomp and glory made in the presence of one to whom God had committed the divine, eternal mysteries of the church, hidden in past ages (Eph. 3:1-12)! The deeds of the king, queen, chief captains and principal men have been long forgotten while Paul's ministry by divine revelation has been reaping untold, eternal blessing for 2000 years. Which world and its glory do we desire and seek after?

24. "And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer."

The Jews, claiming the place of being Jehovah's special favored people, rather than being a source of spiritual blessing to others, followed one single-minded purpose to silence the servant of Christ who spread the good news of God's love to all men.

25. "But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him."

We see the world make an upright judgment that those to whom the "oracles of God" were committed were, through unbelief, incapable of making.

Ed.

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23. "And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him."

Protection, liberty, care and fellowship all were given Paul, though he was kept as a prisoner of the Romans. How lovingly, graciously and perfectly our Father controls every circumstance of His children's lives.

24. "And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ."

A religious outcast and prisoner one who had seen a glorified Christ stands before the heathen Gentile ruler and his Jewish wife. What a solemn occasion in their fleeting moment of time! Enjoying the best a political, social, religious present world offered, they were to hear of something infinitely better—what faith in a rejected Christ offered.

25. "And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."

Paul spoke three truths to these two who indulged themselves in the world to the "lust of the flesh" he presented righteousness, to the "lust of the eyes," temperance, and to the "pride of life," judgment to come. Paul's words of truth brought fear to Felix, but the "pleasures of sin for a season" caused him to reject them.

26. "He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him."

Even though Felix trembled when he heard the truth of God, it did "not profit... not being mixed with faith." How often Felix must have heard the truth in those times he spoke with Paul. Yet the covetousness of his heart blinded his eyes and, as far as we know, that "convenient season" when the "light of the glorious gospel of Christ" might have shone into his dark heart never happened. The Lord Jesus said, "If thine eye be evil... how great is that darkness!"

27. "But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound."

How true the words of the Lord Jesus: "By their fruits ye shall know them"! Though Felix was so deeply affected by the truth that he trembled, his dark heart craved the fleeting wealth and favor of this life more, and he knowingly left an innocent man prisoner. Truly, "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). Blessed is the one to whom God has given "a new heart... and a new spirit" (Ezek. 36:26) through faith in the Lord Jesus.

Chapter 25

1-3. "Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Cæsarea to Jerusalem. Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, and desired favor against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying

wait in the way to kill him."

What a favor these hardened Jewish leaders desired their Roman master to give them the death of an innocent man who loved their nation and told them the truth! Religion, which makes something of man and of his efforts to gain favor with God, is an implacable foe of the grace of God which offers the very best to those who repent, owning that they deserve judgment. May we more enjoy and embrace God's wonderful free grace shown to lost, sinful man!

4-5. "But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Cæsarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither. Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him."

Though it seems Festus displayed some conscience in not giving in to the Jews' wicked desire, it was God who moved all He had ordained concerning Paul's going to Rome. The Jews well knew that they could prove no wickedness against Paul; thus they desired to kill him rather than accuse him. Yet all of man's efforts can never thwart God's purposes. May that give us rest and peace in our pathway.

6-7. "And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Cæsarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought. And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove."

Time was given the Jews (more than ten days), by the ordering of God, for them to sense their awful guilt and solemn responsibility in seeking to stamp out the blessed name of Jesus and the gospel His servant Paul preached. But it seemed of no avail. Their accusations were born of hatred of, rather than love for, the truth. Religion is ever at enmity with the grace of God. Let us always speak (hold) "the truth in love [that we] may grow up to Him in all things."

8. "While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Cæsar, have I offended anything at all."

There is a most solemn character to Paul's simple answer. (The truth needs no embellishment.) He does not say the law of Moses, for it had become a series of meaningless traditions to the Jews. He does not say the house of God, for it had been left desolate to the unbelieving Jews, nor does he say against God, for the disobedient nation was under Gentile domination. He takes them up according to their sad condition, proving himself innocent of their false charges.

9. "But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?"

We need not expect justice from a world which crucified its Creator. Festus was no more upright than Felix. He did the "politically correct thing" to gain favor with the Jews, but he lost for eternity! It is no different today: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you" (John 15:18).

10. "Then said Paul, I stand at Cæsar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest."

Paul defends himself against the injustice rendered, but how unlike the Lord Jesus, who did not defend Himself before Pilate. May we know more of that lovely, divine spirit of meekness and submission.

11. "For if I be an offender, or have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Cæsar."

Those who have free access to the throne of grace need not appeal to the world for justice.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2004, Practical Reflections on Acts - Acts 24:6-22 (24:6-22)

6-7. "Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands."

Because of the Jews' unbelief, they claimed it to be our temple and our law, not God's "house of prayer" (Matt. 21:13) or "God's law" (Neh. 10:29). They would use "our hands" to slay God's servant who, in love for his Jewish brethren, told them the truth. They accused the Roman captain of acting in "great violence" towards them, but themselves wished to do "great violence" to Paul. The darkness of man's heart overwhelms when God's light and truth are rejected.

8-9. "Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him. And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so."

The Jews evidently thought that Felix would give in to their demands to gain their favor. The truth was immaterial, just as it had been when Pilate and Herod became friends and, to placate the Jews, they mocked and then condemned the Lord Jesus to death.

10. "Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself."

Paul didn't make a judgment of Felix as to whether he had been a good or a bad ruler he left that evaluation with God. Since Felix was clearly familiar with Jewish customs and law, the Apostle was happy because he could give a simple answer of the true facts. Christians' opinions of the "fairness" of governments under which we live isn't important, but honest, clear testimony to faith is very important.

11. "Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship."

The Jews had accused Paul of creating sedition among the Jews in all the world (see verse 5). If Christians walk in simple obedience to God, the truth (whether it be believed or not) will always triumph over ignorant accusations and unbelief.

12. "And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city."

How could they accuse Paul of being a ringleader of rebellion when the gospel message committed to him was one of God's grace and love? It's vital that we preach God's message regarding sin, repentance and forgiveness from His Word, rather than disputing against blind unbelief using our intellectual abilities.

13. "Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me."

Paul wasn't trying to cover or excuse anything—he was stating the truth. The Jews had not one shred of evidence proving the truth of their accusations. Oh! that it might be so when the world points an accusing finger at a Christian that it would be merely slander. If we walk as He (the Lord Jesus) walked—holy, harmless and undefiled—it will be so.

14. "But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets."

Paul did confess before Felix something he had done his "crime" was worshipping and serving God according to the Scriptures the Jews themselves held in the utmost esteem (though it was an esteem born of religious pride). How wonderful when believers' lives follow the example of our Lord, who "before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession."

15. "And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust."

The truth of resurrection gave Paul hope, brought the Jews division and debate (see Matthew 22:15-33), and caused Felix to tremble (v. 25). Only among those who hated the truth was resurrection a basis for imprisonment. Does this bright hope show out in our lives, especially towards those who still live in the "region and shadow of death" (Matt. 4:16)?

16. "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men."

Paul diligently tried to keep from offending those to whom he preached the gospel (an excellent example for evangelism today!). But first and foremost he was concerned that he not offend God, who had saved and called him. May God's honor always be first in all we do as His dear children.

17. "Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings."

What an indictment of the Jews! Paul had come to Jerusalem bringing a blessing to the people and an offering to God. The hardened Jews had come to Felix bringing a Roman orator making false accusations against the man who loved them and worshipped God. We shouldn't expect different treatment. May we continue to act in love and grace towards those who, at times, "despitefully use" us.

18-19. "Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had aught against me."

The truth needs no embellishment from a trained orator! The actions of our lives tell the truth far more powerfully than our words those who witnessed Paul's actions evidently could not face or answer the one they knew to be innocent of their charges.

20-21. "Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evildoing in me, while I stood before the council, except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day."

Without expressing anger or displeasure, Paul has distilled the whole issue into its essence the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Orthodox Jews of that day believed in the Old Testament teaching of a resurrection but they hated the thought that Jesus of Nazareth had risen from among the dead. To them, that was intolerable, as were those, such as Paul, who announced that wonderful news to the guilty nation.

22. "And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter."

Felix knew the truth, but, unwilling to deal with it, he did the "politically correct" thing. If he died in that state of heart, he is now reaping the consequences of his decision in eternity forever.

Ed.

23. "And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Cæsarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night."

The Lord had stood by Paul the previous night, assuring him that he would bear testimony in Rome. Thus the Apostle might alone, in perfect peace and safety, have walked by those who lay in wait to kill him. But it was not a time for a display of power. He submits to Roman protection in a display of personal humility and weakness. Paul goes to Cæsarea with no outward show of power, "that the power of Christ may rest upon" him.

24-25. "And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor. And he wrote a letter after this manner."

The simplicity of faith and quiet submission to the will of God bring Paul to Cæsarea, not tired and worn with walking the long journey, but having been carried there by the sovereign ways of God who always does "exceeding abundantly above" our desires and thoughts.

26-27. "Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting. This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman."

How man by nature loves to deal in half-truths—especially when they can be twisted to make him look good! Christians must never give in to this tendency of the flesh to put ourselves always in the "best light." The blessed Saviour perfect Man was always exactly what He said. "They said therefore to him, Who art Thou? And Jesus said to them, Altogether that which I also say to you" (John 8:25 JND).

28-29. "And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council: whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds."

The Lord Jesus was accused before the Roman governor, Pilate, who, well knowing from testimony given that He was an innocent Man, yet delivered Him to death. Here again testimony is given that a man is innocent of any crime against Roman law, yet Paul remains imprisoned. We should not expect any different treatment from a world whose mind has been blinded by its god, Satan (2 Cor. 4:4).

30. "And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell."

If truly righteous, Roman law ought to have taken and imprisoned the Jews who were planning to murder Paul, while freeing the Apostle! The chief captain's actions show the folly of man's vaunted legal standards its inability to "judge righteous judgment." Christians are called to an infinitely higher standard. We are to "walk worthy" of our calling in every area of life (though we are to be subject to "the powers that be"; Rom. 13:1).

31-33. "Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris. On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle: who, when they came to Cæsarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him."

God's purposes are always accomplished. He ordained that the beloved Apostle would bear witness at Rome. But due to man's hatred and persecution, along that journey many more would hear the gospel of a risen, glorified Christ. How wonderfully God overrules every failure of His servants and every enmity of those who hate the name of Jesus. We ought to take courage from this, for God can use even our failures and the trials of our lives to bear witness of His power, love and grace.

34-35. "And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia; I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall."

Felix was more responsible than the chief captain, and his actions were more disgusting. He read that Paul had done nothing "worthy of death or of bonds," yet kept him prisoner in Herod's hall of judgment. Where Paul came from was of more importance to Felix than what he had done. Such a spirit can easily taint our thinking. God is "no respecter of persons," nor should we be such. One mark of the spirit of apostasy in Christendom is "having men's persons in admiration because of advantage." Let's not think more highly of ourselves than we ought (Rom. 12:3). The humility of Christ ought ever to characterize us.

Chapter 24

1. "And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul."

Alienated in heart from God and His Christ, the Jewish religious leaders try to plan for every contingency in order to gain their wicked end the destruction of Paul and the gospel of Jesus he preached. Hiring a Roman orator, they calculate that his eloquence will sway Felix's judgment in their favor. To effectively preach God's truth requires love for Christ and leading of the Spirit, never human eloquence. Paul didn't preach using "enticing words of man's wisdom"; rather, his message was given "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." May we ever lean in faith on the Spirit of God to grant a necessary "word in season" (Isa. 50:4).

2-3. "And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, we accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness."

How false these Jews were! The peace they desired (which the Romans never gave them) was lost when they cried against the Prince of Peace, "His blood be on us, and on our children." They rejected the One of whom "the world itself could not contain the books that should be written," defiantly telling Him, "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man" (John 8:33). Their pretended thankfulness for the Roman yoke—the fruit of their disobedience—was a pitiful, sad lie.

4-5. "Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words. For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes."

As long as "Saul" was making "havoc of the church" and "breathing out threatenings and slaughter" against the body of Christ, these wicked leaders were pleased. But when Paul preached God's love, grace and forgiveness, he became a "pest" an insufferable plague to the Jewish nation. What a picture of man's sinful, twisted and dark heart!

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2004, Practical Reflections on Acts - Acts 23:6-22 (23:6-22)

6. "But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question."

Christians are exhorted to "follow after the things which make for peace" (Rom. 14:19) and to "follow peace with all men" (Heb. 12:14). We speak very carefully here, but the beloved Apostle was far more than a Pharisee; he was a child of God a Christian. Paul spoke the truth but it was not a truth appropriate for that time and surely not a truth spoken by those who would be peacemakers (see Eph. 2:14).

7. "And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided."

How good if our words bring peace and unity rather than dissension and division among those who hear us speak. Too often, even among brethren, unadvised words (though it be truth, yet spoken apart from the Spirit's leading) bring division.

8. "For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both."

For these hardened enemies of Christ, the great question had not to do with theological issues, but rather, "What think ye of Christ?" The Pharisees were right about resurrection, and the Sadducees wrong. But both were eternally, solemnly wrong about the blessed person of Jesus of Nazareth. Let us always deal with fundamental issues before causing divisions over questions or interpretations of Scripture.

9. "And there arose a great cry: and the scribes [that were] of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God."

It seemed that Paul's strategy had gained its desired end. But the flesh, when used to defend the truth of Christ, cannot bring blessing. God's truth must be accepted by submissive hearts prepared by the Holy Spirit to receive it, not forced upon a soul through man's clever intelligence and cunning.

10. "And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle."

Paul's comments, though successful in dividing the Jews, did not succeed in bringing him liberty. Liberty and peace among brethren does not result from setting groups at odds with each other.

11. "And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome."

Even in our moments of failure, the Lord Jesus in gracious love knows perfectly how to encourage our hearts. The blessed Lord knew the motive of Paul's heart was love for Himself and His earthly people. He knew Paul's desire to see the nation blessed, though that desire had led him to a place which was not according to the Lord's will. How sweet and comforting must have been the Saviour's words to the beloved Apostle that night: "Be of good cheer." Only God, who brings blessing out of failures, can say such words. But when He does, let us, no matter how great our failure may be, believe Him!

12-15. "And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy. And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you tomorrow, as though ye would inquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him."

The wicked unbelief of the Jews for Christ, His servants and His truth is relentless. In their blinded condition, they did not realize that "His blood be on us, and on our children" was a far greater curse under which their nation had been bound. But all their plans were useless. If those more than forty men held true to their curse, they died of starvation. What a solemn end for those to whom God had given the Bread from heaven that they might live.

16-18. "And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul. Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee."

The beloved Apostle now displays that wonderful faith which marked his course. Knowing of the murderous plan, Paul uses no strategy of his own to protect himself against his enemies. The Lord had spoken to him and had promised him that he would bear testimony in Rome as he had in Jerusalem. That was enough for faith. No human planning was needed. The report was sent by his nephew to the "powers that be," while Paul enjoyed peace.

19. "Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me?"

What a question! What do we have to tell the world? The young man was right to uncover the plot of the Jews to the one whose task was to keep peace and order in that land. But how much happier the task of Christians to tell out the love of our Lord Jesus to those with whom we come in contact.

20-21. "And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul tomorrow into the council, as though they would inquire somewhat of him more perfectly. But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee."

The report is given without embellishment, leaving all with the one who was ordained of God to maintain order and make necessary decisions. Today we are encouraged to "demand our rights," voting for those leaders who will grant the freedoms we desire. May we, as pilgrims and strangers, leave "the king's heart... in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will" (Prov. 21:1).

22. "So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast showed these things to me."

What a blessed privilege for the believer to go, at all times, into the very presence of our God, pouring out to Him our every fear, concern and want and to do so alone and welcome in His blessed presence.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2004, Practical Reflections on Acts - Acts 22:20-23:5 (22:20-30)

20. "And when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him."

The Spirit of God sends yet another solemn message to the Jews. Though he was just "standing by" when the first martyr of the church was slain, Paul owns his personal guilt in the death of Stephen. What a word that should have been to the Jews! Though they stood by when the Romans put their Messiah to death, they were truly guilty, for they not only consented to but demanded His death.

21. "And He said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles."

The gospel that Paul preached overreached the exclusive boundaries of Judaism. What marvelous, divine grace! The Gentiles prohibited from drawing near to gain God's blessing have a "Hebrew of the Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5) sent to the far off, with God's divine message of love, grace, forgiveness and life.

22. "And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voice, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live."

What blindness religious pride brings! Disobedient to God's laws, guilty of rejecting His anointed One, the thought that others (Gentiles) were now to be brought into the divine blessing they had rejected caused an outburst of Jewish hatred towards the messenger, as previously it had towards the Messiah.

23. "And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air."

Religious pride not only brings hatred; it causes unhappiness (they cried out), shame (cast off their clothes), and humiliation (threw dust). Let us be tender in our hearts, seeking grace that our spirits not be guided by religious pride of place or grace.

24. "The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him."

The world, which ought to have been receiving the light of the testimony to God's grace and love (Matt. 5:16), instead, by the anger of the Jews, is bewildered by their uproar. We easily see what sad results this terrible unbelief and contention brought to God's servant Paul. But what sorrow, confusion and pain results from the contention and strife existing among members of the body of Christ today?

25. "And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?"

Though treated so unjustly, Paul reacts with grace that the Spirit of God alone can give a believer. He does not demand of or issue threats to those about to torture him. His question to the centurion is a beautiful example of submission to the "powers that be [that] are ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1).

26. "When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman."

May we never forget that a world which willingly shows care and deference to its own has no interest in Christ's own. May we ever remember we are pilgrims and strangers here, not living as expecting the treatment and courtesy afforded those who belong to this "present evil world."

27-28. "Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born."

Here we see a beautiful example in the Apostle's life of a believer who uses this world but does not dispose of it as his own (1 Cor. 7:31 JnD). Paul did not "buy" a place in the world, but, being allowed of God to be born into a favored place, used it, leaving the results with God. Are we using the privileges of the place in which God has put us to further the cause of Christ in this dark world or to settle down in it?

29. "Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him."

Because the Roman Empire was in power, there was present profit to be gained by being part of it. Romans had privileges and protections granted them that none other enjoyed. What a question this poses to the heart of each believer! Do we, as citizens of heaven, avail ourselves of the blessings and protection of that glorious kingdom to which we belong?

May we remember the price our blessed Saviour paid for us that we might obtain this freedom.

30. "On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them."

Thinking to finally get the truth, the Roman captain calls the chief priests and the Jewish council to come before Paul. But such hatred of the truth as had overtaken these Jews made that impossible. How solemn! Those to whom the oracles of God had been given, through whom the only true God had been known, were now incapable (as well as unwilling) of presenting the truth to those seeking it. Let us carefully watch every tendency of our hearts that we do not become morally incapable of sharing the truth of God with a questioning world.

Chapter 23

1. "And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."

Until he met Jesus on the Damascus road, Paul had a good though ignorant conscience. "Let your conscience be your guide" is very poor advice to give others. Unless our consciences have been enlightened by the risen, glorified Christ, they will remain dark, ignorant of the truth.

2. "And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth."

We see more results of rejecting the truth. Paul spoke truth he had served God in a good (though ignorant) conscience. The Jewish high priest had a hardened conscience and could tolerate no testimony that troubled him. We rightly think of this act as wicked and unbelieving. But remember, it is possible for us, in a bad spirit, to smite one who brings a reproof from God to the conscience.

3. "Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whitewashed wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?"

Though Paul told the truth, he missed the Lord's mind, for "the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men" (2 Tim. 2:24).

4. "And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?"

Those who opposed the grace of God were quick to use Scripture to point out failure in a believer.

5. "Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people."

Had Paul not missed the Lord's mind in going to Jerusalem in the first place, he would perhaps have realized who commanded him to be struck. Yet, in real humility, he does not defend himself but owns his failure. What a rare yet needed spirit for today!

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2003, Practical Reflections on Acts - Acts 22:7-19 (22:7-19)

7. "And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?"

This is the second of three times, recorded in Acts, of the Lord's voice from heaven calling to Saul. The first (ch. 9:4) is the actual occurrence and we read that "he fell to the earth." Here, where Paul recounts the event before the Jews, he makes that occasion very personal I fell to the ground. The Lord graciously deals with each soul in a personal way.

8. "And I answered, Who art Thou, Lord? And He said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest."

Again, for the sake of his Jewish audience Paul mentions something that is not recorded in Acts 9 I am Jesus of Nazareth. The Lord of glory humbled Himself to one of the lowliest and least-valued places in Israel Nazareth in Galilee. Only faith, looking beyond earthly circumstances, could lay hold of His divinity and glory. What an arrow to the consciences of that Jewish crowd! May we always seek wisdom from the Lord to

speak a "word in season" and specially suited to those to whom we speak.

9. "And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of Him that spake to me."

In Acts 9 we learn that those with Saul saw no man. But here we learn that they "saw indeed the light." We also know from Acts 9 that those with Saul heard a voice but did not understand what was being spoken. What a solemn example of the Lord's quotation from Isaiah regarding the unbelieving Jews: "In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive" (Matt. 13:14; Isa. 6:9).

It is to faith and obedience only that spiritual sight and direction are given. Self-will and sins rob even believers of the joy of hearing the Lord's words and seeing Him in the path of faith.

10. "And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do."

To a man who by faith sees the risen, glorified Christ, as Paul had seen Him in reality on the Damascus road, the only appropriate response is, "What shall I do, Lord?" The only will that counts for the believer is the will of Him who is presently "crowned with glory and honor" (Heb. 2:9). May each be found daily walking in His "good, and acceptable, and perfect, will" (Rom. 12:2).

11. "And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus."

It was more than mere physical brilliancy which blinded Saul we learn here that it was the glory of that light which blinded him to the world. Oh! that we might walk through this "waste, howling wilderness" blinded to all but the glorious light of that blessed, risen Man in heaven our Lord Jesus Christ.

12. "And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there."

Those listening to the Apostle recount his experience could not morally fault those who were witnesses to his conversion. Ananias was one who had a "good report of all the Jews," even though he was a believer in Jesus. May our manner of walk before the world bring a like good report even of those who oppose us. "When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. 16:7).

13. "Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him."

Ananias did not stand in front of the blinded, former enemy in an arrogant or superior spirit. He was a servant of the Lord Jesus, there bearing the dignity of the One who sent him. How beautiful are the Apostle's words, "I looked up upon him." If we maintain the dignity of our position as sons of God, our pathway will be morally above the level of this world. Those in need will not look up at us as being superior, but as being servants of the glorified Christ.

14. "And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth."

Ananias' words confirm the truth of Saul's account of his Damascus experience. The Jews, whether they would hear or not, now have two witnesses that Jehovah of Israel was inseparably linked with Jesus of Nazareth indeed, the testimony is clear; they were one and the same. Let us never give up the divine, precious and vital truth as to the Person of Christ He is God, Jehovah of the Old Testament.

15. "For thou shalt be His witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard."

Paul was to be a witness of a circle of blessing much larger than the Jews all men. The testimony of a glorified Christ was to reach far beyond Jewish boundaries. Paul's witness was based on what he saw and what he heard. To be effective witnesses for Christ we must, by faith, delight in viewing Him as well as hearing and obeying His words. "Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:7-8).

16. "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

Water baptism does not bring soul salvation. But this baptism did bring Saul, a Jew, into a position of administrative (earthly) forgiveness from the sins of which the Christ-rejecting nation of Israel was guilty.

17. "And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance."

It was only when a Jew, now a new creation in Christ, prayed in the temple that what had, in Jewish unbelief, become "an house of merchandise" (John 2:16) was morally, once again, a "house of prayer." May our lives be characterized by dependence on God.

18. "And saw Him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me."

How it must have touched the beloved Apostle's heart to utter these words "get thee quickly out... they will not receive thy testimony" and to utter them in the very place which the Lord had forbidden him to visit. Yet grace still triumphs, for Paul uses the Lord's words (that he did not heed) as a solemn warning to those Jews for whom his heart so yearned. We often fail our blessed Lord, yet He is able to turn even our failures into a testimony to the truth. "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28).

19. "And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee."

The beloved Apostle hides nothing of his past, shameful as he may have felt it to be. And it is here we have an example of the loving intimacy that exists between the Lord and one of His blood-bought own. Do we individually enjoy a like intimacy with Him?

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2003, Practical Reflections on Acts - Acts 21:32-22:6 (21:32-40)

32-33. "Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul. Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done."

If the Jews had believed Paul's message, rather than beating the messenger, they would have received God's grace, forgiveness and deliverance. As it was, the centurion had to deliver Paul from their murderous intent, using "two chains." The world's promises of protection always result in restricting and hindering the Christian. Only faith in the Lord Jesus can bring the joy of true freedom.

Paul's two chains are the same that morally bind every faithful believer in some measure who he was and what he had done. Paul, the "chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15), was a "called apostle" (Rom. 1:1 JND). He who had persecuted the Christ (Acts 9:5) now preached "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21).

The Apostle's disregard of the Spirit's warnings (bringing the restricting chains and loss of liberty) was due to his deep love for the nation of Israel.

Let us walk in the fear of God, being mindful of who we are (sons of God) and what we ought to do in our lives (obey God). In one sense, faithfulness to Christ will bring chains of persecution. Yet they can never restrict the liberty and joy of the Lord. "The truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

34-35. "And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle. And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people."

Now, totally blinded to the love and goodness of God (John 1:5), the Jews' angry unbelief caused a great tumult. But God uses the wrath of man to protect Paul. The Jews' violence brought him the soldiers' protection, who carried him to safety.

36. "For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him."

What chilling proof that the heart of unregenerate man is unchanging in its hatred of God! Having refused the truth, the Jews cry after the servant as they had after his Lord (John 19:15; Matt. 10:25). In our Western lands, rejection of truth may not be so outwardly violent, but it is just as unrelenting.

37. "And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek?"

It is good for Christians to be able to speak in a language the world can understand—not crude or immoral—so as to get its attention for Christ.

38. "Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?"

Don't be surprised at misunderstandings in the path of faith, for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Seven times in the addresses to the seven churches in Revelation 23, the blessed Lord said, "I know thy works." He knows our motives, desires and works. That is enough for faith.

39. "But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people."

To gain the Roman centurion's ear and permission, Paul presented truthful facts the soldier could understand. By doing the same, we may be able to gain the attention of souls we seek to win for Christ.

40. "And when he had given him license, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying."

Since truthful facts had already been rejected by the Jews (crucifixion of their Messiah), Paul gains their attention using grace ("beckoned with the hand") and love ("spake... in the Hebrew tongue").

Chapter 22

12. "Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defense which I make now unto you. (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith.)"

Paul's attitude and words, in the face of violent persecution, brought a great silence and attention from his persecutors. What attitude do we the sons of God display in the face of misunderstanding, persecution and even hatred (Rom. 8:14)?

3. "I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day."

The Apostle does not begin by protesting his innocence or condemning the Jews' treatment of him. He had given up great natural advantage by leaving Tarsus to study the "law of the fathers" at the feet of Gamaliel, doing so in zeal for God a misplaced zeal like their own. Do we, remembering the pit from whence we have been digged, display a similar humble spirit towards those who oppose us?

4. "And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women."

These words ought to have touched the Jews' conscience. Paul's Jewish zeal (greater even than theirs) brought sorrow and death. Now his love and zeal for Christ brought joy and life. It's not wrong to humbly tell others the wonderful difference Christ has made in our lives. But if He isn't the personal Object of our delight, we will have difficulty effectively sharing His glorious gospel with others.

5. "As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished."

None could claim more ardent, willing service to the Jewish leaders. Saul's life is an example of the Lord's words, "No man can serve two masters." A new Master was about to lay claim to him and his life, changing it forever. How much change from the ways of the world is evident in each of our lives?

6. "And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me."

Paul now begins to show "forth the praises" of the One who called him "out of darkness into His marvelous light." Oh! that we might walk by faith in the daily consciousness of the Lord of glory's infinite, loving interest in each step of our life.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2003, Practical Reflections on Acts - Acts 21:15-31 (21:15-31)

15-16. "And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem. There went with us also certain of the disciples of Cæsarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge."

A lovely spirit was displayed in those who companied with Paul! They earnestly begged him not to go to Jerusalem, but when he refused their pleas, they ceased trying to persuade him, though they didn't cease journeying with him. The Lord Jesus will never leave us. Do we display this same spirit towards our dear brethren who may not always heed our advice?

17. "And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly."

Though their reception at Jerusalem was very sweet, it was not God's mind that Paul be there. The fellowship and love of our brethren are not substitutes for obedience to the will of God. "What saith my lord unto his servant?" and "What saith the scripture?" must ever be our guides.

18-19. "And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry."

The Apostle's topic of conversation with the "chief men among the brethren" at Jerusalem was not about himself or his service it was about what God had wrought. May that be the spirit and subject of our conversation together (in the spirit of Philippians 4:8)—to dwell on God's ways of grace and love.

20. "And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law."

"The fear of man bringeth a snare." Here we see the first of the influences which caused Paul to lose his liberty large numbers filled with religious zeal. Though spiritually free from "the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1), the Apostle's deep love for the Jews brought about his physical imprisonment. We must not allow "numbers" or "misguided religious zeal" to hinder the precious truth we are to live and preach.

21. "And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs."

The second influence was the pressure of Jewish prejudice to adapt the gospel of grace to the demands of the law "forsake Moses... walk after the customs." Today there is great pressure to preach a popular gospel palatable to the flesh. Love and grace are emphasized at the expense of righteousness and truth. But grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (who is "the way, the truth and the life") and that in perfect balance (John 1:14,17).

22. "What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come."

The third influence which led to Paul's imprisonment was peer pressure "the multitude... will hear... thou art come." The word spoken by Peter is to be our guide "we ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29) never the demands of the multitude.

23-24. "Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law."

These influences brought an appeal for compromise, associating the liberty Paul enjoyed in Christ with the bondage of Jewish ordinances ("vow... keepest the law"). Spiritual leaders pressed the issue. The compromise even required that Paul pay the expenses of their vows (see JND translation)!

The grace of God is a free gift (Eph. 2:8). How great the cost when we compromise the gospel with man's religion, which makes demands of the flesh.

25. "As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication."

The Jewish disciples were correct as far as they went. But they did not fully understand the truth that in Christ there was no more Jew or Gentile, but one body (1 Cor. 12:13). Christ had brought both together in one new man (Eph. 2:14-22).

26-27. "Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them. And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him."

The compromise almost seemed to work. But old and new wine don't mix, nor can new cloth repair an old garment (Matt. 9:16-17). Trying to mix the grace of God with Judaism brings ruin rather than peace.

28. "Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place."

These who stirred up the people used religion as their excuse, but they were without faith in and love for the God they claimed to honor. They were concerned about (1) the people, (2) the law, (3) this place (the temple), and (4) exclusivity (brought in Greeks). Such principles of legality mark those who reject the person of Christ and His truth, while holding to a mere outward religious veneer of form.

29. "(For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)"

How quick we are to judge appearances. "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24).

30. "And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut."

There was no blessing to be found in what the rejected Messiah had called "your house" (Luke 13:35). It was left desolate, its doors shut to the truth of God now revealed in the gospel Paul preached.

31. "And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar."

When Philip preached the gospel to the outcasts in Samaria, there was "great joy in that city" (Acts 8:8). When Paul tried to accommodate Jewish demands and prejudice in Jerusalem, the result was an uproar. We cannot mix man's religion with God's gospel. Only through the Word of God, spoken in truth by the power of the Spirit of God, can blessing be brought through the grace of God to lost souls.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2003, Practical Reflections on Acts - Acts 20:36-21:14 (20:36-38)

36. "And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all."

Even one with as mighty a spiritual gift and as vital a spiritual service as the Apostle Paul ended his communications with an expression of dependence upon God, the Source of all love, wisdom and power. How do we end our happy times of fellowship together with our dear brethren in Christ?

37. "And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him."

A sweet and appropriate expression of love for one who had been so used in their blessing! Perhaps if there were more ardent love for the Lord Jesus in our hearts, there would be a more ardent display of holy affection and appreciation for our brethren.

38. "Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship."

Paul had warned them of "grievous wolves" and those from among themselves who would cause havoc in the assembly. That warning should have caused them greater sorrow and grief even than the loss of their beloved spiritual father.

The Ephesian saints loved the Apostle deeply and rightly. But we are reminded of what the Lord had to say to the Ephesian assembly in Revelation 2:4: "Thou hast left thy first love." Nothing not even a beloved servant of Christ ought to be allowed to replace our hearts' affections for our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

We should be very thankful for the servants He has given to minister among us. But let our deepest affection always be for the only One worthy of it.

Chapter 21

13. "And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara: and finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth. Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden."

One very important, practical lesson we may learn is that Paul's company did not stop and rest in their journey until they had located disciples brethren in the Lord. May we always seek our fellowship with those of "like precious faith" and with those who "call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Peter 1:1; 2 Tim. 2:22).

4. "And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem."

Though it is a day of great weakness, God honors each desire to gather with brethren to give public expression to the one body of Christ through the remembrance of the Lord. Having found brethren, Paul and his company stayed long enough at Tyre to enjoy that most precious privilege.

The Spirit then used the brethren to warn him not to go to Jerusalem. Those saints in Tyre may not have had much gift, but they were brethren (Prov. 17:17).

The assembly morally is still a city of refuge a place of care for those gathered. If we listen to the Spirit's ministry rather than looking at the ministers, we will benefit. Being occupied with the failures or supposed legalities of the "vessel" through whom God may choose to bring His exhortations may result in loss to the hearer.

5. "And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed."

Here is another sweet example of how much prayer was a part of the early church may it be so with us. Let us give ourselves to earnest collective and private prayer brothers, sisters and children.

6-7. "And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again. And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day."

Paul's voyage ended. Yet, though he may have been eager to continue on to Jerusalem, time was taken to spend one day with the brethren. Let's not neglect the happy privilege of day-by-day opportunities for fellowship with our dear brethren.

8. "And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Cæsarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him."

Paul and his company had fellowship with elders in Ephesus (shepherds of Christ), disciples in Tyre (followers of Christ), brethren in Ptolemais (brethren of Christ), and now an evangelist in his home (messenger of Christ). With whom do we seek our fellowship during our pilgrimage through the world?

9. "And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy."

What a beautiful moral pattern for one seeking to minister the mind and heart of Christ. Divinely given prophecy ("forth-telling" the mind of God) is characterized by being fully suited to the circumstance ("four"), able to bear fruit if heeded ("daughters"), and purity in its content ("virgins").

Philip's home was a place of refuge from the world. His daughters were kept safe from the world's defilement, and Paul's company found rest there.

10-11. "And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles."

The Spirit of God carefully differentiates between proper spheres of ministry. Though Philip's four daughters prophesied and Paul was staying in their father's house, God did not use any of them to deliver His warning to the beloved Apostle. It would have been an unseemly service for Philip's daughters or for any sister. God sends His message through a brother, and, solemnly, it is a brother from the very place that Paul intended to visit Jerusalem.

12-13. "And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

Though we are solemnized by Paul's refusal to listen to the Lord's warnings, we dare not criticize, for he was motivated by deep love for the earthly people of God. For us, all too often, self-love and self-will motivate our refusal to heed God's word of warning.

14. "And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done."

Rather than arguing with or rebuking the beloved servant of God, those of his company cast all on the Lord. Oh that we might have more of that spirit when there is disagreement or tension among brethren!

19. "Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews."

Service for the Lord Jesus must be done in a spirit of humility, a heart of yearning for those being served, and the expectation of conflict from the enemy. The service may be small and unnoticed, but if truly serving Christ, these traits will mark the servant.

20. "And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house."

Service for Christ is profitable. It brings blessing, comfort and encouragement, whether done privately (house to house) or publicly. How important to see that Paul showed an example before he taught a doctrine. It is vain to teach the things of God if the teacher is not first living them in love and reality.

21. "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

The two essential elements for blessing in this life and for eternity are repentance and faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God. May the Lord exercise our hearts never to allow this vital truth of God to be watered down in our ministry to others.

22. "And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there."

Paul's love bound him to a path not according to the will of God. We must speak very softly about the beloved Apostle in this situation, for with us it often is not love for souls, but simple self-will that leads in a path contrary to the mind of God.

23. "Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me."

The Lord graciously warned Paul what was awaiting him. He did not know how those things would come to pass, but the Apostle knew that persecution for the name of Christ awaited him. Would we be eager to serve the Lord if we knew that such persecution awaited us? What a tremendous love and faith the Apostle displayed!

24. "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."

Paul looked forward to finishing his service with joy. Life itself was not important enough to deter him from serving the blessed Lord Jesus. That is the only right motive for our service Christ.

Paul's ministry to the Ephesians was characterized by three fundamental elements. First, he testified "the gospel of the grace of God."

25. "And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more."

Second, he preached the kingdom of God. A person believing the gospel is responsible to walk according to the new life it imparts by faith. The gospel wins souls while the kingdom guides souls.

26. "Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men."

Paul had been faithful in proclaiming the gospel to all with whom he came in contact. Oh! what a standard for our hearts today! Do we leave by actions or words a testimony of the gospel of our Lord Jesus with those we meet?

27. "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."

Here we have the third thing which characterized Paul's ministry the counsel of God. Declaring all God's counsel of blessing gives assurance and joy in our most holy faith. Beautiful moral order of Christianity: faith and conduct, then assurance and joy!

28. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood."

Paul is passing the torch. He had watched over and fed God's flock purchased by the blood of His own (JND) and now that responsibility was passed to the overseers (elders) in the Ephesian assembly.

In this we receive another vital moral principle. Those who desire oversight are to feed the flock. But ruling over the flock will be ineffective if the shepherds are not first feeding and strengthening the sheep of Christ.

29-30. "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."

Two enemies would confront them after the apostles were gone. (1) Open violence and conflict from the outside and (2) subtle, hidden evil from within. It is the same today. Meeting such enemies requires faith, courage, being steadfast, and unmovable.

31. "Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears."

What consistency and love shined in the beloved Apostle's life. May we spend every moment seeking to defend, support and, above all, live our Christianity.

32. "And now, brethren, I command you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."

As we seek grace to walk faithfully in these dark days, let's remember every resource we have and need is found in God and in the word of His grace.

33-34. "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me."

Paul's reason for preaching was single-minded love and devotedness to Christ. What is ours?

35. "I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Paul's actions, as much as his words, taught the precious truths of the Lord Jesus. May we show the gospel before we speak it.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2003, Practical Reflections on Acts - Acts 20:7-18 (20:7-18)

7. "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight."

The reason for the disciples' gathering was to remember the blessed Saviour in death. Let us never forget the chief reason for our coming together: "This do in remembrance of Me."

It is important to see that the "apostles' doctrine" is intimately connected with the remembrance of the Lord. We must follow the apostles' teachings if we are to remember Him in spirit and in truth.

8. "And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together."

Where Christians are truly gathered by the Spirit of God in love for Christ and moral separation from this world, there will be many lights of testimony shining. The many lights were there because they were gathered together in unity. May our testimony in the moral night of this present evil world ever be love, separation from evil and unity as members of His body.

9. "And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead."

Dear Eutychus was fortunate (the meaning of his name) to be found gathered with his dear brethren. But something caused him to become bored with his privileged and elevated position a window. How many windows exist among Christians today!

A window lets us see things in this world. We have many kinds of them. Today some windows are electronic, some are paper and others are windows for our ears some windows can be found in our homes, others in public places. What we see (and hear) through those windows determines whether we morally fall asleep and down to the level of the world we have been viewing, or remain awake to what we read and hear from the Word of God.

Eutychus heard the Apostle, but he saw the world, and the result was first sleep, then a fall, and then death. May those who are so fortunate believers gathered to the precious name of the Lord Jesus Christ be careful what they view through windows.

10. "And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him."

What do we do when a brother or sister in Christ, fallen under the world's influence, fallen through the world's opening, and fallen down to the world's level, no longer exhibits divine life?

Let's do what the beloved Apostle Paul did! (1) He interested himself in the plight of a believer. (2) He went where the morally dead believer lay. (3) He identified with him. (4) He embraced ("enfolding him in his arms"; JND) the fallen. (5) He comforted the brethren by his words and actions.

11. "When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed."

Paul didn't stay on the world's level. A shepherd who goes after a wandering, sick sheep of Christ does not continue to stay there. After shepherding Eutychus, Paul separates from the level of the world, remembers the Lord in His death, enjoys fellowship with those gathered in the upper room, and ministers to them until the "break of day." Believers can enjoy this same kind of wonderful fellowship and ministry until the Lord comes. Do we desire it?

12. "And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted."

The Apostle did not bring the young man back to the upper room. He left that to the responsibility of those locally gathered there. Are we exercised to bring back to the bosom of the assembly one who has fallen asleep and fallen into the world?

They did not stay with Eutychus in the world; they brought him away (JND) from it. Oh! may we know how to bring our dear sleeping brethren young and old away from the world.

How can we bring back and bring away? Prayer!

13. "And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot."

Every servant of God needs at times to be alone with the Lord. So with Paul. But those who desired fellowship with him waited until he came to them.

14-15. "And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene. And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next day we came to Miletus."

Three times in these two verses we read the words the next day. Following Christ, walking together with those of like precious faith and endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace is a path of daily exercise.

16. "For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost."

The Apostle's heart of love for the Jews would not allow him to spend time with the believers in Ephesus. But let's not criticize the beloved Apostle's actions until we have answered before our God what it is that keeps us away from expressing and enjoying collective fellowship with our brethren.

17. "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church."

The Apostle is about to leave a last, loving message for the sake of the believers in Ephesus. Since he won't be there to give it to them personally, he calls for those with local oversight the elders those who were to lead the flock by their example. What a need exists, for those who desire the welfare of the flock of God, to live the doctrine Paul preached.

18. "And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons."

Paul lived what he preached. If we as Christians are not consistent in our lives with that which we say we know, who will listen to what we minister?

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 1999, Practical Reflections on Acts: Acts 1:15-2:13 (1:15-26)

15. And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about a hundred and twenty).

The Spirit of God takes care to record the number of those who gathered. Does this teach that we are to be concerned about numbers? No. But how comforting to know that each one gathered in the place of His appointment is of individual note and joy to our Lord's heart.

16-20. Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishopric let another take.

The little company, having previously displayed love, obedience and dependence, now exercises administrative care. All things are done "decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40) done according to Scripture. All Jerusalem was aware of Judas's awful end, but the Word of God, not public opinion, was the sole guide upon which the apostles acted.

21. Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us.

The one chosen must have companied in fellowship with the Lord and the other apostles. Public service for the Lord Jesus requires private fellowship with Him (Rev. 3:20) and His own. "Follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22).

22. Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that He was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection.

The one to be chosen must also be identified with the public ministry of the Lord Jesus from His baptism to His ascension. Every aspect of our Lord's ministry contains vital principles for our service.

23-26. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two Thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

As far as men were concerned, either disciple was qualified. Perhaps some felt that Justus was better qualified than Matthias. The Lord Jesus alone knew who was to serve according to His purposes.

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:9).

Acts 2

1. And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

Oneness of mind and togetherness in fellowship marked the little company of believers while they waited in Jerusalem! Today professing Christianity has become a sad example of "every man" doing what is "right in his own eyes," thus rendering a public testimony to confusion rather than unity. "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

2. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

Those outside the place of His appointment missed the moving of the Spirit which took place in the house. The house being thus filled with the Spirit had no room for the world! Happy condition for the assembly collectively and for the individual! "Be filled with the Spirit... speaking... singing... giving thanks" (Eph. 5:18-20).

3. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

The tongues' appearance was "parted" (JND), their character was "fire," and their dwelling was "upon each" of the disciples. Though we live in a day of great spiritual weakness, these same three things ought to mark us. Each child of God, indwelt by the Spirit of God, ought to live in separation from evil, display holiness in his conduct, and walk in submission to Christ.

The heavenly tongues are here referred to in the singular "it." The revelation of God is infinite in its varied ways. But God is one, and those who belong to Him are one with Him one in Christ (Gal. 3:28). Dissension and conflict ought not to mark the testimony today, for we are "members one of another" (Rom. 12:5), indwelt by one Spirit (Eph. 4:46).

4. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

As vessels fit and ready for the Master's use (2 Tim. 2:21), they are filled with the Spirit, so they could be used to pour out blessing to others.

5. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

These devout men give striking contrast to the despised, little company in the "upper room." It is no longer an earthly, outward religion, but a heavenly one, laid hold of by faith, with which God begins a new thing.

6. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

Though they understood the languages being spoken, they couldn't understand its message. Religion doesn't give spiritual understanding.

7. And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans?

The 120 despised Galileans didn't have wealth or reputation; they didn't possess great religious knowledge, but their hearts were filled with love for the Lord. The devout men only saw the outward appearance—Galileans—and were perplexed.

8. And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

"How hear we." The Spirit gave these despised believers the ability to render a testimony in a manner that the world understood. "Whatsoever shall be given you... that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost" (Mark 13:11).

9-11. Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

"The wonderful works of God"! In this glorious message man has no place. May such be the subject of our testimony too! Then God is glorified, Christ is honored and the Spirit free to work.

12. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?

These pious Jews were part of the guilty nation who thought they worshipped God, yet they had rejected and slain the Messiah, which resulted in this doubt and consternation.

13. Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.

Natural man can never understand God, and divine things are foolishness to him (1 Cor. 2:14). But this wrath is made to praise God (Psa. 76:10). The disciples were not, as contemptuously accused, drunken through natural excess. But they most surely were filled with new wine joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). The “old bottles” who witnessed this marvelous work mocked that which they themselves could not contain or appreciate.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 1999, Practical Reflections on Acts: Acts 1:1-14 (1:1-14)

Introduction

The following meditations, beginning with Acts 1, are not expository, exegetical or apologetic in nature. Rather, they are meant to present simple, practical Scriptural principles.

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). “Doctrine” is mentioned first, and this is morally beautiful to notice. Every right thought must always be based on the unchanging truth the “doctrine” of God’s divine Word.

However, doctrine is but one of four areas in which the Spirit of God applies the Word to our profit. The other three reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness all have to do with the moral, practical aspects of our lives as believers.

We trust that our readers will find value in applying these simple meditations to the daily circumstances of life. May He be honored in all!

Acts 1

1. The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.

In Luke’s gospel, the Spirit presents Christ to our hearts as the Son of Man perfectly dependent in every step of His pathway here. As man, He began to do and He began to teach. What perfect moral order! He did before He taught. Even as a child of twelve, we find Him “both hearing them, and asking them questions.” He listened; then He spoke. We ought to listen to our God before we speak and then do what we have heard, before trying to teach others!

2. Until the day in which He was taken up, after that He through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen.

Knowing that He was about to be received up into glory, He gave commandments, in the power of the Spirit of God, to the apostles. Having completed His divine service (John 17:4), He thus puts all in order before ascending in glory to the Father.

Believers should thus order all things pertaining to this life with that same divine wisdom by the Spirit (which is available to each saint; see James 1:5, 1 Corinthians 2 and Proverbs), doing so with a view to leaving, not staying in, this world.

3. To whom also He showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

The risen Saviour’s conversation with His beloved disciples concerned the things of the kingdom of God, not the things of this present evil world. Resurrection life (the life all believers have) ought to be a living reality with us one which has a visible effect on all our words and actions.

4. And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me.

Though the Lord was leaving, He would not leave them “comfortless.” However, to enjoy the promised blessing, they must obey the Lord’s word, waiting patiently for its accomplishment at Jerusalem, the place of His appointment. Any other gathering center, no matter how much they might love Him, would miss the blessing of the Father’s promise. “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them” (John 13:17).

5. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

John’s water baptism was to repentance, in preparation for an earthly kingdom. The King had come, had been rejected and had gone back to heaven. Now there was a baptism coming which would mark something much more blessed than an earthly kingdom. The Holy Spirit would baptize them into one glorious body the Christ the church of God. Our lives ought to give public testimony to the blessed place that is ours in Christ.

6. When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

The disciples’ thoughts didn’t rise above this world. They knew by faith that the time was coming when the promised kingdom in all its glory would be restored to Israel, under Messiah. They knew, too, that Jesus was Messiah. But, unable to rise above thinking about the earthly glory of Israel’s kingdom (and their part in it), they forgot what is most important His glory.

It is easy to look for the Lord's coming because of what we will gain fullness of joy and no more sorrow, sin or sickness! But there is so much more. What about His joy His glory? "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isa. 53). How exceeding much joy He will have at His coming! What a motive to pray, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus"!

7. And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power.

Here, there is not a word of rebuke from His gracious lips to the disciples! Yet, as always, He speaks the truth. May the Lord help us to always speak in that spirit and at all times! The Father's perfect wisdom and love would determine the time for Israel's restoration. Knowing that was to be enough for them. They were as we are to wait and trust.

8. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

To witness for Him they needed divine power, not human knowledge. Let's not place undue emphasis on knowledge. While knowledge of the truth is important, love for the Lord Jesus and submission to His will is more important. It was the revelation of Himself in the Scriptures that caused the hearts of those early disciples to burn (Luke 24:32).

9. And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

The Lord Jesus' earthly communications end. The disciples see a Man received up to heaven. That scene of glory into which He is received hidden from their eyes is open to faith. Elisha saw the flaming chariot; Jacob saw a ladder upon which angels ascended and descended from heaven. But we see Jesus, crowned with glory (Heb. 2:9). He who is "God has been manifested in flesh... has been received up in glory" (1 Tim. 3:16 JND). Our affections will be engaged (Col. 3:14) with what our eyes, by faith, behold.

10. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel.

Steadfastly! Nothing in or of this world could attract them away from the object of their hearts' affection. Let's also be steadfast in spirit, occupied with that glory where Jesus sits at God's right hand.

11. Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.

They weren't to continue to stand there gazing. The Lord had given them His commandments and they were to obey. Normal Christianity does not remain inactive while waiting for the rapture. Remember the admonition to Archippus in Colossians 4:17: "Take heed to the ministry... fulfill it." That ministry, however, is not one of setting things right in this world. When the Lord comes in "like manner" as He left, He will set all according to His will.

12. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.

The distance of a "sabbath day's journey" was five furlongs about one half mile. In Exodus 16:29 Moses commanded the people, "See, for that the Lord hath given you the sabbath, therefore He giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day."

Jerusalem was the place which belonged (and still belongs) to the Lord Jesus. Though He will reign as great David's greater Son in the "city of David," for now He has been cast out. In perfect submission to this, He goes "outside" the city. Though outside Jerusalem to ascend to glory (even as He had gone outside it to die), yet in obedience to the law the Lord stays within a Sabbath day's journey of His place.

What a beautiful pattern: obedience to the Word of God and submission to all that God allows for this life! The disciples themselves are an example of this obedience. The Lord had told them to wait at Jerusalem, and, unlike Peter's previous failure ("I go a fishing"), they obey and return to Jerusalem to wait.

13. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Mattheus, James the son of Alpheus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.

Love for Christ doesn't always need specific instructions. They were to "tarry... in... Jerusalem," but it is not recorded that He told them where. Affection led them back to that room where He had said, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer." In the J. N. Darby translation it is, "They went up to the upper chamber." Those who desire to meet around Himself must be guided by the same thing affection for Himself. Knowledge of truth, though vitally important, is no substitute for love for the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

14. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren.

Dependence and obedience! What vitally important traits which marked these early disciples and ought still to mark believers today! Obedience, born of love for the Lord Jesus, brought them to the place of His appointment. Dependence (prayer and supplication) preserved them there.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2003, Practical Reflections on Acts - Acts 19:35-20:6 (19:35-41)

35. "And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?"

The town clerk's calm reason falls far short of God's truth. Fallen man must have a fallen goddess to worship. In their darkened, heathen fantasy, the Ephesians chose one who fell down from heaven (JND) rather than accepting the glorious truth that God in the person of the Son willingly came down from heaven. The eternal Son, in the form of a servant, made in the likeness of men, tasted death. Thus every knee should bow and every tongue confess "Jesus Christ [as] Lord to the glory of God the Father." What joy to willingly bow before Him now!

36-37. "Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess."

In the midst of such heathen darkness, there is a bright testimony rendered to the actions of those who preached the gospel. It was clear to all that Paul and his company had taken nothing from them, nor had they used the gospel as a means of insulting their heathen superstitions.

Some false religions teach their adherents to destroy the lives and take the possessions of those who refuse to accept their message. The true gospel of the grace of God saves lives and gives blessing. Let us be very careful of the spirit in which we proclaim the "good news from a far country."

38. "Wherfore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead [accuse] one another."

When the blessed Saviour was accused, He answered nothing (Mark 15:3). Sweet and needed spirit for believers! "When He was reviled, [He] reviled not again." Many governments are proud of their judicial system which gives opposing parties equal opportunity to defend themselves. We need not defend ourselves, for our God is the "Judge of all the earth," and He has promised to do right. "He careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

39-41. "But if ye inquire anything concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly."

What a stark contrast between the fruit of man's idolatry and the fruit of true Christianity. One produces an uproar; the other, peace with God. Do we experience an uproar in life or do we experience peace and quietness in happy fellowship with Him?

Chapter 20

1. "And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia."

When all of the world's riot, unrest and confusion are a thing of the past, we still have our unchanging God and His unchanging Word as our refuge. May we be to each other what Paul was to the believers in Ephesus a provider of peace and love in the midst of trial and persecution.

2. "And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece."

Paul returned to Macedonia where previously at Philippi he and Silas had been so brutally treated. But the Apostle was as diligent in His preaching as the enemy was active in his opposition. Are we daily and diligently reading, embracing and speaking to others of the precious truths that are ours in Christ?

3. "And there abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia."

The Apostle did not flaunt his faith. Knowing that a "treacherous plot" (JND) had been set in motion by the Jews, rather than sailing to Syria as he had intended, he returned through Macedonia. "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself" (Prov. 22:3). Knowing that God is over all and we may trust Him fully for our safety does not mean we are to willingly place ourselves in harm's way.

4. "And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus."

Though we do not get doctrine from the meaning of names, they do have important significance. Those seven who accompanied Paul are mentioned by name, and the meanings of their names certainly suggest the character and joys of those who associate themselves with Paul (for us, morally, identification with Paul's doctrine). Thus, we will find in his company fathers (Sopater), rulers (Aristarchus; see Heb. 13:7,17), humility (Secundus), rejoicing (Gaius), honoring God (Timothy), happiness (Tychicus) and nourishment (Trophimus). Why would we ever seek for fellowship in this world when these blessings are so freely available?

5-6. "These going before tarried for us at Troas. And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days."

We are not told why the seven went ahead of Paul, but the Word assures us that they did not continue to travel apart from his company. They waited at Troas until all could be together to remember the Lord Jesus in His death. Let us diligently seek, as far as possible, to walk together, "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the [uniting] bond of peace."

Today the assembly of God, as to its public expression, is sadly divided, not gathered together as a public testimony of unity and oneness. Yet, even the two or three may still enjoy the precious privilege of being gathered together by the Holy Spirit to remember Him, thereby giving expression to the one body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

21-22. "After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season."

The heart is the seat of affections and determines the spirit which motivates our actions. A heart filled with love for Christ (1 Peter 1:22) is vital in serving one another (Gal. 5:13). On the other hand, believers are solemnly warned about having an "evil heart of unbelief" (Heb. 3:12).

Paul's spirit of desire to visit Jerusalem was motivated by his deep heart-love of God's earthly people. May our spirits also be guided by true heart affection for our Lord Jesus Christ.

23-24. "And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen."

The gospel Paul preached caused a large change in the lives of a large number of those previously sunk in heathen idolatry. Little wonder that those who reaped no small gain were aroused to cause no small stir against the truth of God.

25. "Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth."

Too often wealth is man's measure of right and wrong, of acceptable or unacceptable conduct. Riches provide sufficient excuse for every kind of evil behavior.

What motivates our behavior as children of God? May it ever be love for the Lord Jesus Christ and obedience to our God and Father.

26. "Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands."

How the world hates the truth! It will have wars, pestilences, famines, sorrow, sickness and death. But it will violently resist the truth of God and those who preach it truth that brings life and joy.

27. "So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at naught; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth."

Demetrius was concerned about the desecration of the heathen goddess only in the measure it affected his wealth. Blind superstition and foolish religious loyalties in the otherwise enlightened Ephesians were stirred when he suggested that the magnificence of their goddess—mere inanimate wood and meta—was belittled by Paul's preaching.

The world will tolerate Christianity in some measure as long as it does not demean or deny its idols of wealth, fame, lust and power.

How vital that believers bear testimony by our lives that Christ, and Christ alone, brings satisfaction and life. Let us heed the words of the Apostle: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

28-29. "And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theater."

Idolatry in any form (religious or material) reaps abundant wages of unrestrained anger and mindless confusion. In a later time, when Paul was accused of being mad (insane), he calmly replied that he spoke the words of "truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25). Idolatry's mindless, blind slavery of the heart rejects reason and integrity.

May we bow to the Word of God, walk in its truth and submit to its authority. Otherwise, even careers or some harmless natural joy will supplant Christ in our hearts, thus becoming an idol.

30-31. "And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theater."

Paul's desire to identify with the truth he had preached and with his brethren is commendable. But it wasn't wise. Idolatry is as unreasonable as it is unholy. For Paul to seek to defend the faith in the midst of a mindless riot was to cast pearls before the swine. The brethren, in love for Paul, kept the truth he preached from being trampled and kept him from being rent by those who, through idolatry, had morally fallen to the level of swine.

While we should ever seek to live the truth and defend the truth, wisdom is needed for how and where to stand for the truth of God. Sometimes it is best to wait until we are asked (1 Peter 3:15).

32. "Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together."

"God is not the author of confusion," rather of peace and comfort. All of the energy, zeal and wealth spent on idols only produced confusion, discontent and tumult. These very same things are sure to beset believers who allow objects of this world to become more important than the Lord Jesus Christ.

33. "And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defense unto the people."

Jewish religious prejudice tried to profit from heathen anger at Paul's preaching, hoping to add to his rejection in Ephesus. The gospel needs no defense. The Jews were as blinded in their religious animosity as the Ephesians were in their idolatry.

34. "But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians."

The mindlessness of idolatry is frightening. Their goddess took no more notice of their chanting than did Baal of his prophets' blood (see 1 Kings 18:26-29).

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2003, Practical Reflections on Acts - Acts 19:7-20 (19:7-20)

7. "And all the men were about twelve."

We are not to be occupied with numbers, but it is interesting to note how often the Spirit records numbers for our learning. When numbers become a matter of pride (2 Sam. 24), God brings solemn judgment. But there are other, important, "moral" lessons to be learned when God records numbers.

These twelve Gentile disciples, having been saved, baptized, filled with the Holy Spirit and given sign gifts, were now administratively responsible (symbolized by the number "12") to their risen Head in glory. The assembly gathered to His name acts with administrative authority in the fear of God.

8. "And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God."

The beloved Apostle continues seeking to bring the truth before his beloved brethren in the flesh. Faith in Christ is to be displayed by moral conformity in daily life actions suited to God's kingdom.

9. "But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus."

Paul did not continue to strive when the truth was rejected. Rather than subjecting the glorious truth to evil speaking (in moral principle, casting "pearls before swine"), he leaves the synagogue, where the truth ought to have been known and embraced, and uses a Gentile to preach God's truth.

10. "And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks."

The hardened Jews heard things concerning the kingdom of God for three months. All they of Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus for two years. Let's use the present "two years" of God's grace to faithfully preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

11-12. "And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them."

God graciously and powerfully confirmed the truth of Paul's preaching through miraculous signs. Today we have the written Word of God to confirm the truth of the gospel. But practical blessings ought to be a normal result of preaching the gospel. We do not expect miraculous events to confirm our words, but good works certainly ought to clothe our words.

"If a brother or a sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one from amongst you say to them, Go in peace, be warmed and filled; but give not to them the needful things for the body, what is the profit?" (James 2:15-16 JND).

13. "Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth."

What a horrible and blasphemous use of the precious name of Jesus by those who were guilty of His death! Fallen man dares to dabble in the spirit realm, seeking to gain supernatural power, when, as a slave of Satan, he is helpless and powerless against those very forces of evil by which he is enslaved.

Believers can display moral and spiritual victory over Satan in daily life, for "greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world." The infinite power of the blessed Spirit of God indwelling us gives the power to "resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Mere religious profession is helpless and worthless.

14-15. "And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?"

Their position as sons of the chief priest should have provided power to overcome the enemy's opposition. But the whole Jewish system had itself been overcome by evil. Thus there was no acknowledgment or trembling by the evil spirit in the presence of these seven sons. It is only in the presence of the Son of God that devils fear and tremble. Walking in the reality of faith as sons of God gives us power, dignity and victory over the enemy.

16. "And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded."

The emptiness and helplessness of their false profession became naked and open, not only before God, but before all they had tried to impress. Connecting false Christian profession with Satanic power results in awful defeat, pain and scars.

17. "And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified."

The name of Jesus was invoked by the seven apostate Jews in an attempt to mimic the power of God. But God uses His solemn judgment to glorify the name of the Lord Jesus. Let us ever own, submit to, and speak lovingly of our blessed Jesus as Lord.

18. "And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds."

Real faith produced by godly fear brings repentance and confession. Our lives and testimony should always be marked by such reality.

19. "Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver."

Man valued his Creator God, come to set at liberty those held captive by Satan, at thirty pieces of silver, while books about the power which held man in bondage were valued at fifty thousand pieces of silver. How dark the wicked delusion of man's heart!

20. "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed."

The living, eternal, never-changing Word of God is victorious over all man's foolish, wicked books filled with the works of Satan. May our lives always be directed by the liberating power of the Word of God.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2003, Practical Reflections on Acts - Acts 18:25-19:7 (18:25-28)

25-28. "This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: for he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ."

Apollos presents a wonderful moral pattern that ought to be seen in every servant of Christ. There are seven important moral qualities that he displayed—qualities that those who would serve the Lord today (especially in public ministry) ought also to display.

(1) Apollos was "eloquent... mighty in the Scriptures" (see vs. 24). The Greek word for "eloquent" is *logios* and has the sense of "rational" and "wise." He was more than a gifted orator. He spoke circumspectly—there was nothing pretentious or unreasonable about his words concerning the Lord, nor his manner of speaking. He knew his subject well.

(2) Apollos was instructed in the way of the Lord. Scripture had its proper moral effect on his life and actions. This is more than mere head knowledge. There is a great danger of being satisfied with knowing the words of the Lord, without allowing them to have their proper moral effect on our ways.

(3) Apollos was fervent. He was not a casual, "Sunday only" believer. The Word of God had laid hold of his heart and he was zealous in living and teaching others what he enjoyed for himself.

(4) He was diligent. How much time we believers waste today dabbling with the empty, vain things of this world while remaining unfamiliar with the precious truths of the Word of God.

(5) Apollos was bold. The truth that he understood laid hold of his heart. It was a daily, living reality with him, and thus he boldly presented what he enjoyed to Jewish opposers.

(6) He was teachable. No doubt he was a far more gifted speaker than Aquila and Priscilla, but he was willing to listen to and learn from those who had not his evident gift. In doing so, he became an even more fruitful servant of Christ. Oh! May those who seek to serve the Lord ever remain teachable!

(Notice, too, the lovely, vital lesson we learn from the order in which Aquila and Priscilla are here mentioned. When it was a matter of affection, Priscilla is mentioned first (see Acts 18:18; Rom. 16:3). But when it is a matter of teaching, Priscilla gives place to her husband. Beautiful moral order!)

(7) Apollos was fruitful in his service for Christ. He was a blessing to the brethren with whom he came in contact, and he was a powerful voice to the unbelieving Jews on behalf of the rejected Jesus.

Chapter 19

1-2. "And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost."

As with Apollos, these believers needed to be led into the enjoyment of Christianity "more perfectly." Hearing John Baptist's message, they had acted upon it in faith. However, the Holy Spirit's indwelling believers was unknown to John. Paul desired that they now enjoy their full Christian blessings.

Let us also have a similar desire helping other believers to fully enjoy all the riches that are theirs in Christ. But we need to be enjoying those riches for ourselves first not just knowing about them.

3-5. "And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

The truth of Christianity takes these dear believers beyond Jewish repentance important and necessary as that was for the Jew. John had pointed the people he baptized to the coming Christ Jesus the One who was to come after him. The disciples' actions (baptism) showed the reality of their faith.

6-7. "And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve."

How perfect is the Word of God! Without laying on of hands and even as Peter was speaking, the Spirit fell on the Gentiles (Cornelius and his company; Acts 10). Seeing such visible signs of power, the Jewish believers recognized that under grace there was no difference between them and the Gentiles. After this Peter baptizes the Gentiles.

But here the men were Jews already baptized to John's baptism and Paul (rather than Peter) lays hands on them so they can receive the Spirit. Then they, too, give evidence of His indwelling through signs. The ways of God are not always the same, but they are suited in divine perfection to each circumstance.

We must learn the practical lesson this teaches us for today. There is a great danger that we may begin to think that each circumstance is to be treated in exactly the same way. This deadens needed exercise in our hearts and leads to viewing God's Word only as a rule book its divine precepts being applied in every case on the basis of tradition.

Fresh exercise for each fresh circumstance (whether collective or individual) is painful. But if we are to enjoy blessing and fruit in our lives (and the assembly), we must look at and deal with each new circumstance in godly fear and dependence upon Him. Only in this way will God's Word remain living and powerful for us.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2003, Practical Reflections on Acts - Acts 18:15-24 (18:15-24)

15. "But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters."

What a commentary on the spiritual condition of those who had, as God's chosen, earthly people, received His oracles! These divine communications—the revealed mind of Jehovah meant for Israel's blessing—were, to the Gentiles, nothing more than ethnic traditions of a troublesome people. The Jews' public testimony was such that it caused the "name of God" to be "blasphemed among the Gentiles through you" (Rom. 2:24). How solemn!

How vital to live the truth of God (fully revealed to man through Christianity) in daily reality, love and devotion. We are an "epistle [of Christ]... known and read of all men" (2 Cor. 3:2).

16. "And he drove them from the judgment seat."

How vastly different from the days of Ezra, who was commanded to "set magistrates and judges, which may judge all... such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not" (Ezra 7:25)! By the Jews' rebellion against God they had forfeited the opportunity to teach the law of God to Gentiles.

17. "Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things."

Previously Crispus, who had believed Paul's gospel message and had been saved with all his house, had been chief ruler of the synagogue. Faith in Christ doubtless cost Crispus his place among the Jews in Corinth. A believer in Jesus would never be allowed to fill such a prominent religious position in local Jewish society. Crispus lost his life in this world for "My sake and the gospel's" but found it preserved for eternity (Mark 8:35).

Sosthenes ascended to that place of local Jewish repute saving his life in this world later reaping the unjust outburst of Gentile wrath.

Let us measure everything that seems lost for Christ's sake in this world in the balances of eternal glory. When there, it will be fully revealed from what we were spared in this world by bearing the precious name of Jesus through our pilgrim path.

18. "And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow."

In Numbers 6:18 we learn that one who had taken the vow of a Nazarite was to shave his head when his vow had ended. Though we are not told what vow Paul had taken, Paul's love for his nation seems to cause him to take up with Jewish ordinances in order to win the Jews (1 Cor. 9:20).

Priscilla and Aquila are with Paul ministering to him not as under a Jewish vow, but in full Christian liberty. This is the way in which God would have each serve Him in the full liberty of divine grace.

19. "And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews."

The Apostle faithfully carries the gospel "to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile." His motive was deep love for God's earthly people. His heart, as Joseph's of old, yearned for them, that they might be turned from their blindness and guilt individually and as a nation to believe in the One they had despised and crucified.

May love (for Christ, for His own and for lost souls) always be the only motivating factor of our service.

20. "When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not."

The Spirit of God seemed to be at work among the Jews in the Ephesian synagogue. Unlike other Jews encountered in his missionary journeys, these desired that Paul would stay longer with them.

Love for the Jewish nation apparently caused him to neglect a promising opportunity. Let us be found "redeeming opportunities" (Col. 4:5 JND).

21. "But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus."

It did not seem to be God's will that Paul go to Jerusalem, and the result was that he never again visited the Ephesian assembly, though he wrote a divinely inspired epistle to them from prison.

We would fear to criticize the beloved Apostle, but may we never even for love's sake assume a lower place or service than that which we are called to and have as members of the body of Christ.

In one sense, Christians do have feasts to keep—morally, the feast of unleavened bread (1 Cor. 5:8), and, in actual fact, the remembrance of the Lord (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

22. "And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch."

The Apostle allowed nothing to cause him to "miss" visiting an assembly where Christians were gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Though his desire to visit Jerusalem hurried him on his way, he did not fail to stop long enough to visit the brethren in Caesarea. Are we diligent in not allowing circumstances to keep us from gathering to the Lord Jesus with those of "like precious faith"?

23. "And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples."

The desire and effect of Paul's ministry was to strengthen the disciples the work of a pastor and teacher. Paul was orderly in his ministry, for the One he served is "not a God of disorder" (1 Cor. 14:33 JND). There is never an excuse for a believer to live in disorder or to allow his life, home or work to be characterized by confusion.

24. "And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus."

Eloquence is not enough to fit one for God's service—nor is knowledge. The Scriptures held moral weight in Apollos' life he walked in what he knew. Let each be diligent to walk according to the light they have then more will be given.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2003, Practical Reflections on Acts - Acts 18:3-14 (18:3-14)

3. "And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers."

Paul, who labored tirelessly for his Saviour, was willing to work with his hands when necessary a wonderful spirit as well as an excellent example! And his secular work was perfectly in keeping with his ministry making tents. Paul's ministry is specially occupied with the church and its glorious Head in heaven. Those who are passing through this world as pilgrims and strangers morally need tents rather than permanent buildings in which to dwell. May every aspect of our lives be temporary in nature we are not here long.

4. "And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks."

The spirit of the Apostle's reasoning was such that those who heard him were won by his words. Paul's reasoning is quite different in spirit from the great reasoning the Jews had with each other in Acts 28:29 (endless questioning) and the "doubtful disputations" (arguing) of Romans 14:1. The Jews questioned because they would not believe the truth. Sometimes Christians argue about the truth, trying to prove some personal viewpoint. But we as Paul did ought to so speak that others, willing to hear the truth, might be brought to Christ.

5. "And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ."

May we have a similar effect on one another—supporting, encouraging and stirring up hearts and lives to be more zealous, more earnest for Christ (Heb. 10:24). The arrival of his two beloved companions so strengthened Paul's heart that he all the more ardently presented Jesus as the Messiah to the Jews with whom he met.

6. "And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles."

Faithfulness to Christ will bring the reproach of Christ. The Jews opposed Paul and blasphemed the truth of God regarding Jesus Christ, His Son awful opposition with terrible consequences. Paul had been faithful; they rejected the faithful word of truth and were left to their solemn judgment. Though it must have broken the beloved Apostle's heart to see such blinded rejection of the truth, his conscience was clear. He had done what he could to turn the unbelieving Jews to the Saviour. Have we done all we can in displaying Christ before a perishing, blaspheming world?

7. "And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue."

Justus was a truehearted worshipper of God. Until Paul brought new light and truth, he remained attached to the one place that the truth of God could be known the Jewish synagogue. It had become a place which blasphemed the truth, causing Paul to leave and enter the home of a faithful worshipper. May our hearts, lives and homes provide a place where Paul (that which answers to the revealed truth of God) is welcomed.

8. "And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized."

Paul's preaching was not without fruit in spite of Jewish rejection. The truth so laid hold of Crispus that he and his house believed: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:31). Jesus, the despised and rejected Messiah, became more precious to dear Crispus than his position as chief religious ruler. "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

9. "Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace."

Sweet encouragement to the Apostle who, after the unhappy confrontation with Jewish hatred and blasphemy, might have been disheartened. How cheering the Lord's words must have sounded to this dear servant. May we eagerly listen, moment by moment, to hear that same divine voice encouraging us to press on in our service for Himself.

10. "For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city."

When the Lord sends one to a service, He gives wonderful reassurances promising His presence to remove fear, His protection to give strength, and His sovereign purpose to yield fruit. Let us serve Him faithfully, remembering that as long as we are left here, He has much people yet to be saved.

11. "And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them."

To the unbelieving, blaspheming Jews, the Apostle had reasoned, persuaded, testified, and finally left them. But the Word of God was not constrained, for he remained in Corinth to teach the truth to all who were willing to hear. Let us always be willing to hear (and live) the truth of God.

12. "And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat."

God's promise that "no man" would "set on thee to hurt thee" was not broken by the Jews' assault against Paul. He was protecting Paul and the preaching of His Word. But the Jews are, by their inveterate hatred of the truth of God, about to feel a measure of the judgment of God for their wickedness. They were going to have to reap the fruit of their blasphemy against Jesus and the truth presented by His servant.

13. "Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law."

Man's religious heart will ever choose and desire to be put under law, assuming he has the ability somehow to please God by what he does. What horrible, blind pride! As Cain hated Abel's sacrifice when his own works were refused by God, so men hate God's free grace, choosing rather to offer their dead works of righteousness, which are but filthy rags. Oh! let us enjoy and then proclaim the wonder of God's sovereign grace!

14. "And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you."

What a rebuke to the Jews from an idolatrous Gentile ruler! Though he had no interest in the truth of God, Gallio realized that Paul's preaching was not born of wrongdoing or criminal intent.

For eighteen months he had lived above public reproach so that he did not need to open his mouth to defend his actions. May our lives give a like testimony of purity and harmlessness in this world.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2002, Practical Reflections on Acts - 17:27-18:2 (17:27-34)

27-28. "That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us: for in Him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring."

A person who is blind feels after a thing, seeking to find it by touch. What an indictment of the Athenians, so proud of their intellect and philosophical abilities! Paul could not have been more plain: Their wisdom and philosophy was less than worthless in gaining knowledge of the true God. The reality was that they were reduced to feeling—searching for God as those blinded by their minds (see 2 Cor. 4:4). But in this very thing, the grace of God is clearly proclaimed by the Apostle: "Though He be not far from every one of us."

What a difference it would make in our daily walk and joy as believers if we really, in faith, laid hold of how close our blessed God is—so close that at any moment we are welcome into His presence before "the throne of grace," so close that His Spirit dwells within each believer and so close that our blessed Jesus will "never leave . . . nor forsake" His own!

29. "Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device."

Their own celebrated poets had at least been able to discern that their origins were not from a piece of slime, as evolution would teach today. But though admitting a Superior Being, the Athenian idolaters thought their puny minds could conceive objects of worship from the artistry of man.

How far below the infinite glory, holiness and dignity of the divine were their foolish, man-made attempts to recreate God in gold and silver images!

30. "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent."

There was a time when God in long-suffering grace overlooked such foolish ignorance because He had not yet been revealed in Son (Heb. 1:2). Now all that can be known of God by man has been fully and perfectly revealed in and by the Lord Jesus. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."

Because of this infinite revelation in His eternal, well-beloved Son, God no longer overlooks man's self-willed, proud and ignorant thoughts. His command has gone forth, not to build temples and idols to the unknown God in order to worship what cannot be seen, but to repent for what man has done to God when He made Himself to be seen in Son.

31. "Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead."

If mankind will not have the Saviour's love, they will have His judgment. Solemn thought. How long-suffering He is—how much He desires that man would come now, receiving blessing and pardon—full and abundant.

The principle is just the same for believers. God desires to show grace. His loving heart is to bless; judgment is His strange work. But His children may miss the blessings He would give if they do not walk in self-judgment with the eye of faith firmly fixed on Himself, their hearts in communion with His.

32. "And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter."

That one should arise from among the dead was beyond the ability of their vaunted reasoning to understand or accept. What an apt picture of our natural hearts, so deceitful and wicked (Jer. 17:9). In that pinnacle of man's intelligence (the Athenian Areopagus), God's wonderful truth is mocked by some and discounted by others. What do we do with the precious Word of God—infinitely beyond our reason—when it reveals to our hearts that which our mind is not capable of understanding? Oh! for a spirit of unquestioned submission!

33. "So Paul departed from among them."

Solemn fact! Paul might spend “a year and six months” with the worldly Corinthians, turning them by the Spirit from darkness to light. But when man’s mind begins to reason and dispute the indisputable truth of God, Paul will not stay. Vital principle! Honest questions concerning the Person and work of Christ require our greatest patience. Mere intellectual reasoning and debating with the truth of God is not to be encouraged or tolerated.

34. “Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.”

At least one of those lofty reasoners submitted to an infinitely superior truth—as well as a dear sister and others. Thank God for the other—“unknown, and yet well-known”—lights for God in a place of intellectual darkness and superstition. May our light shine brightly for Christ in this dark world!

Chapter 18

1. “After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth.”

Leaving those few in Athens to bear testimony there, Paul moves on to preach elsewhere. Eternity will reveal the results of those who heard, believed and preached the gospel in the Areopagus and in the streets of Athens. May we, too, be more faithful in proclaiming the gospel where we are.

2. “And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome,) and came unto them.”

How often have we seen in Acts that when the enemy seeks to get rid of any testimony to the truth of God, greater blessing results. Aquila and Priscilla are, through the edict of Claudius, introduced to the Apostle Paul. What happy times they must have enjoyed together as Paul taught them from the Scriptures! How true—“all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8:28)!

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2002, Practical Reflections on Acts - 17:15-26 (17:15-26)

15. “And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.”

Are we conducting Paul through this world? That is, are we a living testimony of the doctrines given to him for the church by our ascended and glorified Saviour? The modern day “Athens” in which we live is still full of man’s intelligence and philosophy, yet ignorant of the true God. May we bear Paul and his gospel of our risen Lord and Saviour into “Athens.”

16. “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.”

What an apt picture of the world that we live in today. In the Western world, idolatry has more to do with material possessions and sensual pleasures, while perhaps in other parts of the world it has more to do with false religion. But whatever the reasons, man has a multitude of idols—those things which take the place that God alone ought to have in each heart. May we be careful that our lives as believers do not slip away from our precious Saviour so that we too become “wholly given to idolatry.”

17. “Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.”

Paul did something about that which caused such deep stirrings in his heart. May we not only see the condition of things around us, but seek in divine love to bring the liberating gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to those who are captives of Satan and his minions. Everywhere Paul went, he preached the gospel. May our lives—every aspect of them—preach the gospel to those around us.

18. “Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.”

The Epicureans and the Stoicks were at opposite ends of the philosophical scale—the one addicted to enjoying every kind of human pleasure and delight, and the other dedicated to absolute refusal to allow human emotions of joy or sorrow to effect their lives. Christ alone can bring lasting joy, and He alone can give peace in the midst of sorrows and trials. To the philosophically blinded Athenians, the truth of Christ’s death and resurrection only added one more strange god to their pantheon. But let us, like Paul, be faithful in preaching “Jesus, and the resurrection.”

19-20. “And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.”

The God who loves man so much that He sent His only begotten Son to become a man, willingly die, then rise from the dead, all so that men who have no thought of or care for Him might be saved, blessed and made eternally happy, was the essence of the new doctrine which so confused the intelligent and philosophical Athenians.

What a comment on the moral bankruptcy and darkness of man's natural wisdom! It judged the truth of God—a crucified, now-living, risen Christ—to be nothing more than strange things!

21. "(For all the Athenians and strangers which were there, spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing.)"

Here is the reason why the Athenians were "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7). They were always eager to hear something new—a new line of reasoning, a new philosophy. May we be content with the divine, unchanging truth of God. Though "old," it is living, ever "new" and always applicable to our current life.

22. "Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious."

The Athenians were totally given up to the worship of demons. The place (the Areopagus in Athens) boasting the very pinnacle of man's wisdom and philosophy resulted only in their being sunk in the depths of satanic delusions! What glory and light are found in the One who is "the way, the truth, and the life." Our God is light and love. Let us walk as "children of light , and . . . the day" (1 Thess. 5:5).

23. "For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you."

Let us remember that "the world by wisdom knew not God" (1 Cor. 1:21). Man, so very proud of his wisdom and intelligence, has, by it, sunk into the lowest possible religious darkness, a total slave of satanic delusion and at infinite distance from the God who created him. May we be willing to bear the reproach of being thought "fools for Christ's sake" (1 Cor. 4:10) as we live and preach the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

24. "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands."

Paul begins his message to the Athenians by telling them the truth about themselves—they were totally given over to the worship of demons and were completely ignorant of the one true God. This was a characterization impossible to accept apart from a humbled, repentant heart.

The only true God, which their wisdom and philosophy failed to reveal, was infinitely greater than the philosophies propounded in the Athenian Areopagus. The architectural beauty of those temples still causes wonder and admiration today. Yet, the unknown God they ignorantly worshipped—infinitely greater in majesty—fills all creation with His glory but is the object of man's hatred, unbelief and scorn!

25. "Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things."

Cain tried to give the best of his efforts to God, but he and his offering were rejected. Yet the very life and breath that he expended to bring the "fruit of the ground" as an offering to God came from the very One who could never accept anything from the sinner, save his repentance and faith in the Saviour. The approach to God and eternal blessing is "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21)—not beautiful buildings or man's philosophies or his supposedly great wisdom.

26. "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation."

The Athenians (mankind today as well) thought that by their wisdom they were the masters of their destinies. What foolishness! God created them and has appointed their time and place, and it is to Him they are responsible. Oh! what a solemn message we have to present to this Christ-rejecting world. But are we doing it—through our actions and words?

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2002, Practical Reflections on Acts - 17:1-14 (17:1-14)

12. "Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: and Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures."

How lovely to see that the source and foundation of Paul's "reasoning" was the divine, unchangeable Word of God—not the puny mind of man. His reasoning was far different from the great reasoning that the unbelieving Jews had among themselves in Acts 28:29 concerning Paul's message to them.

Faith in the Word of God gives assurance, but man's wisdom can never find out God's truth, for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God . . . neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14).

What is the guiding principle upon which we preach Christ and defend our faith—"what saith the Scripture" or the "enticing words of man's wisdom"?

3. "Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ."

A suffering, dying and risen Messiah who was Jesus of Nazareth—this was the intense, personal message of Paul to the Jews. May that same fervent spirit characterize our communications as believers!

4. "And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few."

In Acts 13:50, the Jews were able to stir up the religious "women of the upper classes" (JND Trans.) to get rid of Paul and Barnabas. Here, the "chief women" became true worshippers of the Lord Jesus.

Only the reality of faith in Christ (not religion or position in society) can bring a real change of heart. In the western world, especially in North America, there is a danger of placing emphasis on being religious, being successful, and being popular, seeking to make the gospel of Christ more acceptable by connecting and mixing it with those things.

5. "But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people."

How religious flesh hates to be denied when the Spirit acts! The Jews saw their numbers (even among the "devout Greeks" and "the chief women") dwindle. Realizing they had lost the upper classes of society as effective tools of hostility towards the gospel of Christ, they unite with the lowest rabble—a part of society from which they would normally separate.

Though we see the Jews' guilt in their awful spirit, what about our own spirits? Do we become jealous or even openly oppose the efforts and energies of those who are being used to bring lost souls to Christ through ways with which we may not agree? Let us be careful of our spirits!

6. "And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also."

What a confession of the power of the gospel comes from these haters of the name of Jesus! They had done their best to destroy (Matt. 27:20), to hide (Matt. 28:11-15), and to stamp out (Acts 8:1) that way. But now, according to their very own admission, the followers of Jesus had changed the world!

Christians—pilgrims and strangers—are not here to change this present evil world by becoming involved in its politics. But we individually and the church collectively ought to bear testimony to our rejected, risen Head in glory. In the measure a believer walks in love for the Lord Jesus and faithfulness to Him, the world will be positively impacted—turned upside down—by his walk.

7. "Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus."

The human heart's deceitfulness is strikingly displayed by the guile and hostility of the Jews' twisted accusations against Paul. They knew that calling into question Caesar's supreme authority would cause an uproar among the Greeks, arousing the patriotic fervor of Caesar's citizens. Yet the Jews truly hated Caesar and His domination over their nation almost as much as they hated Christianity.

Let us never act in a spirit which would use this world or its political systems to seek to gain that for which God would have us depend upon Him alone.

8-9. "And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the others, they let them go."

Dear Jason and the others who had been saved in Thessalonica learned a lesson that each believer who desires to walk in fellowship with the Lord must learn: The truth costs (Prov. 23:23; 2 Tim. 3:12). Oh! to be willing to pay the price of holding fast the truth of God against all the attacks of the enemy.

10. "And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews."

The night was not only the time when, to avoid further confrontation, Paul and Silas left, but it also described the Jews' moral condition—as it does for those today who reject the truth in Christ. It has been said, "Light rejected brings night." May we ever walk in the light of the truth of God.

11. "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so."

This remarkable commendation of the Spirit—"more noble"—was not due to the Bereans' social or financial status. They are commended because, for them, the Word of God was the ultimate and final judge of all—even the message of an apostle of Jesus Christ. May we too allow the Word of God always to be the final judge and guide for every detail of life. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee" (Psa. 119:11).

12-13. "Therefore many of them believed; also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people."

Should we be surprised that when the Spirit of God blesses (individual souls, families, our marriages, or in the assembly), the enemy immediately sends his agents to stop the blessing? Knowing this should not discourage our hearts in any little service the Lord has entrusted to us. "Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed. . . . The Lord thy God is with thee" (Josh. 1:9).

14. "And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still."

The ways of our God are past finding out! The enemy seemed to succeed in getting rid of Paul. But faithful men remained to strengthen the Berean believers. May we individually morally answer to faithful men while praying that God will be pleased to raise up such for the blessing

of His church.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2002, Practical Reflections on Acts - 16:25-40 (16:25-40)

25. "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them."

The darkest part of the night found voices raised to God in praise and thanksgiving. What does this poor, dark world today hear from us? They who are without Christ are prisoners. How beautiful to note that Paul and Silas are not referred to as prisoners, for the Son had made them free. What liberty we have in Christ—liberty to sing in the darkest, most painful and depressing circumstances of life.

26. "And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed."

All of man's monumental efforts to impede and thwart the gospel of the grace of God are quickly proven worthless against His infinite power. Not only was the prison shaken, but Paul's and Silas's songs of praise triggered events leading to the prisoners' freedom. Are we singing in this dark prison—the world (Col. 3:16)? The Lord Jesus commanded those around the now living Lazarus to "loose him, and let him go." Let us also loose prisoners into the liberty "wherewith Christ hath made us free" (Gal. 5:1).

27. "And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled."

This poor world knows nothing of the liberating power and grace of God. We live in a world whose only answer to seeming failure is hopeless death. May our lights, as those possessing eternal life, shine brightly in this poor, dark scene of failure and death!

28. "But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here."

What a beautiful example of grace and truth—grace to give hope and help to the guilty, and truth to reveal the true condition of things in a world blinded by the lies of the devil. As long as we are still here, dear believer, there is hope—salvation—for the lost.

29. "Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas."

Light is so desperately needed in this morally dark world. We are "children of light" (1 Thess. 5:5). Let us be found walking in that glorious light, letting it shine for those still trapped in the darkness of sin.

30. "And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

The jailor turns to God, doing "works meet for repentance" (Acts 26:20). His first act is to set at liberty God's truth, as represented by Paul and Silas. May we strive for that happy condition in souls—repentance which accepts (rather than imprisons) the truth of God presented to them.

Where there is true heart repentance, there will, of necessity, follow the earnest question, "What must I do to be saved?"

31. "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

Here is the simple and yet profound answer upon which eternal issues of life hang! How simple, beautiful and full of hope is the gospel message. The jailor knew death awaited him at the hands of the Roman government for failing in his duty to keep the prisoners; instead, the trembling jailor hears words of life both for himself and his family.

32. "And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house."

This is more than the gospel—it is the revelation of God through His Son, Jesus Christ. May we not be content with only seeing souls saved (vital and wonderful as that is), but also with seeing them grounded in the truth of God.

The question is not, Does God desire to bless our families (households)? Rather, it is, Do we want the truth of God (pictured by Paul and Silas) in our homes and lives? Is the truth not only welcome, but do we desire to live it? Oh! may we willingly listen to the living, life-changing Word of the Lord.

33. "And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway."

The reality of the jailor's conversion is plainly proven. "By their fruits ye shall know them." He uses water to give public testimony of the change in his heart—repentance (washing their stripes) and identification (he was baptized and all his).

34. "And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house."

Having identified with Christ through repentance and baptism, the jailor now identifies with the Lord's servants by showing them Christian hospitality and love. Real faith evidenced by the jailor's actions was rewarded with real joy in his heart and home.

35. "And when it was day, the magistrates sent the sergeants, saying, Let those men go."

The magistrates perhaps realized that they had gone "too far" in allowing innocent men to be so beaten. But they were not repentant towards God for their wicked actions, proven by their haughty dispatching of underlings to release those they had so wrongly and cruelly treated.

36-37. "And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace. But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out."

Yes, they could go in peace, but would that leave a proper testimony to the glory, honor and majesty of the One they preached at Philippi? Were they to steal away as though they were simply common criminals, thus casting dishonor on the Lord's name?

They would bear, without complaint, personal insult and injury, but the Lord's name must be cleared if their preaching was to remain effective.

38. "And the sergeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans."

Foolish men! They fear what the Roman government would do to them for their treatment of two of its citizens, but they display no fear of what God will require of them for their wicked treatment of His beloved servants.

39. "And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city."

A clear testimony is rendered to the purity of the gospel and the person of Christ. Those who publicly beat innocent servants of Christ now give public testimony that they were wrong and the gospel right. "Let God be true, but every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4).

40. "And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed."

Having passed through such a fiery trial of unjust treatment, these dear servants of Christ are now fit vessels to be a comfort to the new believers in Philippi. May we use the trials we are allowed to pass through in life as a means to encourage others.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2002, Practical Reflections on Acts - 16:14-24 (16:14-24)

14. "And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul."

Though Paul's visit to Thyatira was outwardly characterized by great weakness (sitting outside the city, preaching to the women who had assembled to pray), he was faithful in "that which is least." God blessed the Apostle's words to the heart of Lydia, and, from that seemingly insignificant beginning, a mighty work began to unfold, and thus Paul was found "faithful in that which is . . . much" (Luke 16:10).

May each believer—young and old—be faithful in the special ministry the Lord desires each one to carry out for Himself!

15. "And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us."

Lydia's faith was personal (as it must be for each one). She could not save her family, but she did, by faith, place them on the same ground as she, in reality, occupied—dead to this world and risen with Christ. Each one in her house would have to make that outward position of blessing good by personal faith in Christ. (Baptism does not impart eternal life.)

Lydia then learned the joy of fellowship with the "apostles' doctrine." She invited Paul and his company into her house. The Apostle's presence (a picture of the blessings the truth of God brings to believers) was based on her walk (faithful) and her desire for the truth taught by Paul ("she constrained us").

May we, like dear Lydia, desire that our lives, families, and, indeed, all that is ours be guided and blessed by the divine principles of the "apostles' doctrine."

16. "And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying."

Another has said that prayer is a mighty engine. The enemy well knows the power of prayer and will use any means at his disposal to disrupt it, seeking to stop a true work of God. As the "angel of light," Satan uses guile ("a certain damsel possessed") rather than violence to hinder this particular work.

17. "The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation."

Using partial truth, the enemy attacks the truth by seeking to associate with and confuse it. The gospel that Paul preached (the gospel of the grace of God) does not reveal the "most High God"—a revelation suited to the gospel of the kingdom and the millennium.

Paul's gospel shows to man Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God who reveals God as Father (John 20:17). Those who have been "redeemed with the precious blood of Christ," call God, by the Spirit, "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Let us preach the gospel in truth, simplicity and clarity!

18. "And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour."

The enemy doesn't give up, but he must ever give in to the infinite power of the name of Jesus Christ. What preciousness, power and value are in His name!

19. "And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers."

The owners of this poor girl had but one use for her—to make financial gain of her demonic bondage. They would tolerate Paul and his gospel only so long as it allowed them to use her to gain riches.

When she was truly set free (John 8:36), they seek to imprison Paul, having no use for the gospel.

20. "And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city."

What hypocrisy! Those who thought nothing of enslaving and troubling the very soul of a poor, helpless girl dare to accuse those who brought her peace and liberty through the name of Jesus. Believers ought never to expect more uprightness from the world than was shown to our blessed Lord. His name will bring reproach in the measure we who bear it are used to bring blessing to lost souls.

21. "And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans."

How subtle is the enemy! Christian liberty in Christ has nothing to do with the bondage of Judaism. But the men, in order to get rid of that influence which had denied them part, at least, of their ill-gotten gains, set the Jews and their religious customs at odds with imperial Rome and its pagan traditions.

The gospel of the grace of God through Jesus Christ sets the soul free from both systems. How good if believers today would live in the full enjoyment of the "liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free."

22. "And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them."

The multitude, so proud of their rights and freedoms as Roman citizens, rise up together, united against those who brought them the message of true freedom. The servants of the Lord are subjected to humiliation ("rent off their clothes") and suffering ("commanded to beat them").

Paul and Barnabas, who were being so cruelly and unrighteously treated, are not recorded as uttering one word in their own defense or in an attempt to escape suffering for Christ. Beautiful submission!

23. "And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely."

Having vented the rage Satan had inspired in them against the apostles, the people now seek to insure that their preaching is also stopped.

24. "Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks."

Man sought to restrain the truth. God was about to show the utter futility of man's hatred of the gospel.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2002, Practical Reflections on Acts - 16:1-13 (16:1-13)

1. "Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek."

To natural sight, Timothy didn't possess the qualifications seemingly needed for ministering to the beloved Apostle Paul. He was timid by nature, coming from an ethnically divided home—Hebrew mother and Greek father—having a saved mother and, probably, an unsaved father.

Yet this vessel would later be characterized by the Apostle as one ministering among the people of God who would "naturally care for your state." What a wonderful encouragement for a godly parent, yearning for a child, but who feels their family circumstances are not all they ought to be.

2. "Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium."

A nice commendation of those who knew Timothy best! They saw him daily. "Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right" (Prov. 20:11). One who would serve Christ needs to be commended to the consciences of brethren. How grave to undertake Christian ministry when believers who know us best have serious reservations about our testimony or qualifications.

3. "Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek."

Jewish law (and certainly Jewish prejudice) would seem to deny circumcision to the son of a mixed marriage (see especially Ezra and Nehemiah, where the wives of mixed marriages were sent away). But Paul acts in the liberty of the Spirit, showing grace to the Jews of that place. May it be that every act of our lives is marked by grace.

4. "And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem."

Though on a "pastoring" journey (see Acts 15:36), the "apostles' doctrine" is the foundation of their visits. Every ministry undertaken by a Christian ought to be founded on the truth and principles of the "apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42).

5. "And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily."

When our heart's desire is to shepherd the people of God, doing so according to the truth of God, the saints of God will be strengthened and encouraged.

6-8. "Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas."

A servant of Christ must ever be submitted and sensitive to the Spirit's leading. Otherwise, service becomes a matter of self-will and self-pleasing. Paul may have seen many opportunities to preach the gospel in Asia and Bithynia, and evidently he desired to do so, but the Spirit of God did not allow him go there at this time.

We should not be discouraged in service for the Lord just because things don't seem to work out as we had intended or thought they would. When forbidden of the Spirit to go to one place, Paul submits and goes to another. For a time it may have seemed to Paul that he had missed the Lord's mind, but, by faith, he does not give up in discouragement—nor should we. "Wait on the Lord" (Psa. 27:14).

9. "And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us."

Having submitted and waited, the Apostle receives a clear direction from the Lord by means of the vision. If submitted to His will and waiting for His direction, the Lord will, in His perfect time and perfect way, make the path plain to the servant. What happy words for a servant to hear! "Come over . . . and help us." Paul received an invitation, the direction, and a purpose for his ministry. All was now plain.

10. "And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them."

With a sense of the Lord's leading, Paul and his company immediately acted. Faith both waits and acts. We often get the order mixed up—acting when we should be waiting, or waiting when we should be acting. The Lord grant us to trust Him fully!

11-12. "Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; and from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days."

As far as we know, the vision that Paul had received gave no specifics concerning the location at which he was to arrive. What is very clear is that the Apostle and his company went to Macedonia as quickly as possible and, evidently, by the shortest route possible.

Perhaps all too often when the Lord has laid an exercise of service on our hearts, we hesitate, wanting to know ahead of time how all the details will be worked out. But such reasoning is not faith. Once there is the assurance of the Lord's command to go, let us do so by faith, trusting Him for each step of the way.

13. "And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither."

A man had called Paul in the vision, but his company was evidently content to be found with that which speaks of weakness rather than power—the "women which" came to pray. The city of Philippi may have seemed to have offered far more possibilities for a large and active service, but Paul was content to be identified with those who acted in dependence on God. How good for each who seeks to serve the Lord to be found in the attitude of prayerful dependence.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2002, Practical Reflections on Acts - 15:28-41 (15:28-41)

28. "For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things."

The apostles, elders and assembly at Jerusalem fully submitted to the Spirit of truth, and they did so in oneness of heart. This single-minded submission and oneness with the mind of God is the key to Christian happiness today—individually and collectively.

29. "That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well."

These four things are moral principles that go beyond Judaism. To observe them would in no way put the Gentile assembly under Jewish law, and, in fact, they ought always—in reality and in moral application—to be seen in each believer's life: Purity in relation to God, in relation to life and in relation to God's institutions, especially marriage.

30. "So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle."

It is beautiful to see the submission of spirit in Paul and Barnabas who had earnestly and rightfully contended for the faith against bad doctrine. Yet they take the humble place and wait at Jerusalem until they "were dismissed" ("let go"; JND). They did not lord it over those they had contended with and whom they had proven wrong. Oh! that God would grant us to have such a humble, quiet spirit today! How much sorrow and bitter feelings could be avoided among brethren by a quiet, humble spirit.

31. "Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation."

The lovely spirit of submission to the mind of God through the Apostles and the oneness of mind of all the saints in Jerusalem have their happy effect on the Gentile believers in Antioch. There is no debating or questioning the apostolic decision—rather joy and comfort in the judgment.

32. "And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them."

The apostolic epistle carried few words for the believers in Antioch. The prophets brought many words of exercise and comfort to them. How good to be able to visit brethren face to face, strengthening the vital bonds of love and unity.

33. "And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles."

When the Spirit had used them according to His will, Judas and Silas were submissive. They submitted to the assembly conscience as led by the Spirit, staying until the assembly let them go. They didn't assume a superior attitude (as brethren from Jerusalem) to force their wills. Displaying submission to the will of the Antioch assembly, there was peace.

34. "Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still." This verse is not found in the most reliable biblical manuscripts, and both Mr. Darby and Mr. Kelly leave it out of their translations.

35. "Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also."

Paul and Barnabas taught and proclaimed the Word "with many others." Though unnamed, these brethren also were doing the Lord's work. May we be found daily doing whatever it is the Lord has given us to do. Eternity will reveal the blessings resulting from the efforts of the myriad of unnamed laborers. Let each one labor today in view of the coming day of revelation.

36. "And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do."

Five words describe the heart of a shepherd: "And see how they do." May each of us who have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ have that heart's desire to see how our brethren are getting on in this dark wilderness!

37. "And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark."

We read that "in the multitude of counsellors there is safety" (Prov. 11:14). Barnabas made a personal decision, and immediately his spirit and willingness to submit to the counsel of others is tested. We cannot go on happily in our service or with each other if our spirit refuses to hear others' advice. We must allow the possibility that the Lord is sending counsellors to help rather than hinder us.

38. "But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work."

Paul had no personal animosity towards or jealousy of John Mark. Rather, he was able to see what Barnabas evidently missed: Dear Mark's faith was not yet strong enough for what would be required on the proposed journey.

One who engages in the work of shepherding (pastoring) cannot allow discouragement or opposition to turn him aside.

39. "And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus."

How sad that dear Barnabas, who was known as "the son of consolation" (Acts 4:36), ends his happy fellowship and service with Paul in a spirit of "contention." The Spirit of God is, from this time, silent as to Barnabas' ministry. May the Lord give us a spirit of lowliness and submission, following after "things which make for peace" and seeking "as much as lieth in you" to walk in fellowship with one another.

40-41. "And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches."

Paul was commended by the assembly to the grace of God needed for his ministry. Assembly fellowship in a servant's work is vitally important and ought to be coveted by the servant of the Lord.

Ed.

12. "Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them."

Peter had just reminded the Jewish believers of Israel's failure in keeping the law (vss. 7-11). Now Barnabas and Paul, rather than continuing to remind them of their failures, turn their thoughts to the blessings and efficacy of God's sovereign grace.

13. "And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me."

Beautiful spirit on the part of James! He was perhaps the most influential brother in the assembly at Jerusalem. Yet he does not interrupt the others, demanding to be heard first. Instead, humbly waiting until the others had finished, he then gives his mind.

14-15. "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written."

All that was spoken must be judged by the Word of God. It didn't matter what one even so prominent as the Apostle Peter might say concerning God's blessing reaching out to the Gentiles. It was James, perhaps the most ardent Jewish apostle, who submits to Scripture, laying aside personal feelings.

16-17. "After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom My name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things."

Man's sin and failure can never hinder God's sovereign counsels of blessing. But it is the Lord who brings blessing to all mankind through sovereign grace—not Jews through keeping the law. Scripture, applied by the Spirit from Amos 9:11-12, sets at rest the hearts of the Jewish disciples.

18. "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world."

It is lovely to see how James takes the Jewish believers beyond their understanding and rests in the infinite wisdom of God. How important that we, as believers, ever rest in God's wisdom rather than our understanding in every circumstance of our life.

19-20. "Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: but that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood."

Each believer must live up to the light of truth he has received, while not demanding that others do so (troubling one for whom Christ died).

There are, however, things that are fundamental to the doctrine of Christianity. These must always be insisted upon—such are the four things James notes.

21. "For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day."

While James did not impose Jewish exercises on the Gentile conscience, neither did he deny the honest exercise of Jewish believers. Their consciences would have been troubled by completely doing away with the synagogues and the sabbath.

22. "Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren."

The apostles and elders were given (by the ascended Lord Jesus) a place of special care over His assembly. But the church (assembly) was in happy fellowship with their guidance and decisions.

Today the assembly does not have apostles or officially appointed overseers. But it is important that believers happily submit to the apostles' doctrine (found specially in the epistles) for Christian doctrine and practice and seek to obey those who morally are shepherds and guides (Heb. 13:17).

We also see a beautiful expression of unity expressed by the assembly in Jerusalem with the Gentile assembly in Antioch. Brethren from Jerusalem are sent back to Antioch with Paul and Silas in order to express this oneness in the Lord and to bear witness to the communications which they carried.

23. "And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia."

Marvelous grace of God—the letters are addressed to the brethren! The Jewish assembly in Jerusalem thus expresses complete unity with the Gentile assembly in Antioch, as well as Gentile believers nearby. The salutation is a proof that those in Jerusalem now fully accepted that the grace of God had reached beyond the nation of Israel.

How sweet to find those believers with whom we can express fellowship and unity simply as members of the body of Christ.

24. "Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment."

The apostles, elders and assembly's gracious communication to the saints in Antioch provides vitally important principles for guiding communications between assemblies today.

(1) Paul and Barnabas' testimony was accepted as adequate witness ("we have heard").

(2) They displayed full fellowship as members one of another ("went out from us").

(3) They expressed genuine concern for the brethren in Antioch ("subverting your souls").

(4) They gave clear, immediate apostolic judgment ("to whom we gave no such commandment") in order that the believers in Antioch might continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine.

25. "It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul."

Here are some more necessary principles for interaction between assemblies!

(1) The assembly displays unity. They have endeavored to keep the unity of the Spirit.

(2) Though the apostles and their direct representatives (see Titus) had authority to make official appointments, the whole assembly as gathered together (guided by the apostles' doctrine) chose men according to moral power (chief men among the brethren).

(3) The assembly at Jerusalem expresses to Antioch the perfect oneness of the body of Christ ("our beloved Barnabas and Paul"; see 1 Cor. 12:12,20).

26. "Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

How much we need to follow the example of the apostles in this verse! They willingly and rightly recognized and appreciated the ministry of others.

However, they valued what they had done for the Lord, not how it had been done. That would have made Paul and Barnabas the focus of attention rather than the Lord Jesus.

27. "We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth."

The letter served as one witness and the words of Judas and Silas (Jewish brethren) served as a second. In perilous times we must ever act on this principle.

"In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established" (2 Cor. 13:1).

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2002, Practical Reflections on Acts - 15:1-11 (15:1-11)

1. "And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved."

A severe test—from their "brethren"—confronts the young Gentile assembly in Antioch. It is often easier to deal with open opposition from the world than the subtle dangers involved in bad teaching disseminated by professed or real Christians.

This particular teaching was appalling, for it added to the infinitely precious, finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary's cross.

The Spirit and the flesh, law and grace, old wine (Judaism) and new wine (Christianity)—none of these can be successfully united. Although believers today may not literally confront men from Jerusalem, the doctrine that we must do something to earn God's grace is, sadly, very prevalent in Christianity. Such false doctrine is terribly dishonoring to the Lord Jesus.

2. "When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question."

This verse would better read, "A commotion therefore having taken place, and no small discussion on the part of Paul and Barnabas against them" (vs. 2 JnD). Paul and Barnabas did not cause dissension by arguing or debating about the precious doctrines of Christianity they had received, but they vigorously defended the truth, and we should do the same.

The early believers endeavored to "keep the unity of the Spirit" by sending Paul, Barnabas and other brethren to Jerusalem to settle this serious question.

Let us always settle every question concerning the precious truth of God by referring to the "apostles' doctrine"—never by the efforts of man's intellect.

3. "And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. "

This is a vitally important principle to follow in these present days of confusion! Though beset with a most serious controversy, Paul and Barnabas didn't spread the difficulty to other brethren. Rather, they "caused great joy" and enjoyed sweet fellowship.

Spreading sad and serious local difficulties to other believers is a poor way to build "up yourselves on your most holy faith. "

4. "And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. "

Here are two more helpful principles! (1) The assembly, not a select group of men, is mentioned first as receiving the brethren from Antioch. (2) It is to the assembly (along with the apostles and elders) that they declare, not the problem introduced by Judaizing teachers, but how God used them.

The assembly (not individuals) extends fellowship and receives an accounting from the Lord's servants.

5-6. "But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter . "

We find a fourth vital assembly principle. When dissension arises within the assembly, responsible brothers (apostles and elders)—not the collective assembly—gather to consider the details of the problem.

Today when there are no longer living apostles, it is responsible brethren (elders—overseers) using the Word of God (the apostles' doctrine)—not the whole assembly—who come together to consider problems which may confront the local assembly.

7. "And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. "

The word disputing is better rendered discussion (vs. 7 JND). There is never an excuse for fleshly disputing or arguing within the assembly or within the brothers' care meeting. "Let all things be done comelily and with order" (1 Cor. 14:40 JND). "Follow after the things which make for peace" (Rom. 14:19).

8-9. "And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. "

In halting the wrong teaching of the overly-zealous Jewish believers, Peter (who himself could be swayed by strong Jewish prejudice; see Gal. 2:11) shows that there is no difference in the way God was now working with Jews and Gentiles in grace. The foundation of God's blessing among both races of people was faith, not works.

10. "Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?"

The law had not brought the Jewish nation into blessing, and it could never do so for the Gentiles. May we never forget the absolute futility of our efforts and the all-sufficiency of His sovereign grace.

Further, seeking to obtain blessing through human efforts is not only fruitless, but it is still trying (tempting) to do what God has already judged as worthless. If the most divinely favored earthly race of people (the Jews) were unable to obtain blessing through works, why do Christians think they can gain God's blessings through those means? Religious labor, so valued by the flesh, is, in fact, nothing more than an intolerable yoke which none could ever bear to God's glory.

11. "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. "

The Jewish nation had failed in their responsibility of keeping the law. Grace alone suited such a condition. The Gentile had never been in such a privileged and responsible place as the Jew; grace alone could suit his condition. Only the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ can save those who are responsible for sinning against God.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2002, Practical Reflections on Acts - 14:15-28 (14:15-28)

15. "And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein."

The people of Lystra, seeing a power they had never before witnessed in their "dumb idols" (1 Cor. 12:2), foolishly prepare to offer sacrifices to mere men. The apostles, rightly in great distress because of this, describe the true character of such wickedness (1 Cor. 10:20) as vanity (useless, devoid of truth).

How much religious energy and zeal is expended today under the banner of Christianity which must, sadly, be characterized in the same way—vanity.

Our Christian service should be energetic, full of zeal ("do it heartily, as to the Lord"; Col. 3:23), but ever guided by "whatsoever He saith unto you, do it."

16-17. "Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

Every natural blessing they enjoyed gave witness to and came from—not their false, worthless idols—but the true God made known in the gospel Paul and Barnabas preached. But, being unthankful, they "became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Rom. 1:21).

May we heed the warning in Proverbs 4:23 lest we fall into the spirit of idolatry (anything that takes the place of Christ in our heart): "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."

18. "And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them."

Their hearts were so steeped in the dark wickedness of idolatry, that even the Lord's apostles could barely keep them from doing sacrifice. How hopeless the condition of man's heart apart from God!

19. "And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead."

If the enemy cannot destroy the message of the grace of God through the corruption of idolatry, he will stir up violence through hatred of the truth.

The light of God's truth (Paul and Barnabas's message) could scarce restrain the heathens from offering sacrifice to the apostles. The darkness of the Jew's hatred of Christ quickly moved them to kill God's messenger. What an indictment of our hearts!

20. "Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe."

But those (the disciples) who had been "called . . . out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9) surrounded the Apostle and received him back. May we be found, as it were, surrounding and supporting the apostles' doctrine in a world that seeks to destroy the precious truth of God it teaches.

21. "And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch."

What a display of the grace of God! The apostles return first to the very place where they had met so much spiritual and physical opposition—Lystra! Here is a wonderful example of a principle of God's Word: "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" (Psa. 118:6).

22. "Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

Paul and Barnabas's return to Lystra was by no means a fleshly challenge to those who had earlier misused them. Their purpose was the edification (building up), exhortation (stirring up) and comfort (binding up) of the believers (1 Cor. 14:3).

23. "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed."

Apostolic power could (and did) appoint overseers in each assembly to look after the spiritual welfare of the local gatherings. But the apostles also taught that the Lord (not men as gods) was the only source of all power and care, and the believers were (and are) to depend on Him alone.

24-25. "And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia."

The opposition of Satan, the ill-treatment of the heathen, the hatred of the Jews—none of it turned aside Paul and Barnabas from completing the service to which they had been called by the Spirit of God.

God fully and perfectly supplies all that is needed for the service to which He calls each of His own.

26. "And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled."

The JND translation reads "committed" in the place of "recommended." It is important to remember two things about the Lord's servants: (1) They are the Lord's servants and receive their directions from Himself, not from man. (2) Their service for the Lord ought to be carried out in the conscious sense of having been happily committed, by the brethren, to the grace of God in their service.

In this aspect, the assembly—the conscience of brethren—plays an important part in a servant's labor. May we be found in deep, earnest prayer (and fasting) for each servant of the Lord.

27-28. "And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples."

Servants are nothing more than channels of God's blessing—what is important is what God does.

Paul and Barnabas not only served by preaching the gospel to others, but they served the local assembly where they willingly abode a long time.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2002, Practical Reflections on Acts - 14:1-14 (14:1-14)

1. "And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed."

The way in which the apostles spoke was used by the Spirit of God in great blessing. While it is always the Spirit of God that brings fruit (God "giveth the increase"), let us in our spirit and words follow the pattern Paul gives in Colossians 4:6: "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt."

2. "But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren."

Man's sad history has ever been a contest between mind and heart. Christ has, by the Spirit, worked in and won our hearts. The enemy, as he did with Eve, seeks to affect our mind by reasoning. Faith does not reason; it loves, trusts and obeys.

3. "Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of His grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands."

The Spirit opens the way for the gospel in spite of the severe opposition. The words of grace and truth preached by the apostles were given witness and support by the works of signs and wonders. Though this is not a day of miracles, our words as believers should always be supported by our actions.

4. "But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles."

What a sad but accurate picture of the condition of man today regarding God and His truth. There is no neutral ground—no gray area—regarding Christ. Every soul is either for Him, owning Him as Lord (Mark 9:40), or acting in enmity against Him (Col. 1:21).

5. "And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them."

What is in man's heart eventually comes out in his actions (Matt. 7:20). Those who, under normal circumstances, would have nothing to do with each other join together in seeking to stamp out the words of life they had heard. Sometimes we are fooled into thinking that the world accepts us, but in whatever measure believers live for Christ, so they will feel His rejection and persecution (2 Tim. 3:12).

6. "They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about."

The gospel was the "word of His grace" (vs. 3). Fighting against violence was not in keeping with the message they preached, and the apostles fled. Christians must ever guard against a spirit of fighting to set things right—whether against persecution or in the world. "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay saith the Lord" (Rom. 12:19). "If My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight" (John 18:36).

7. "And there they preached the gospel."

Today, like those here, servants guided by the Spirit can find full liberty to preach the gospel.

8. "And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked."

What a picture of the condition of man—unable from birth to walk for the glory of God! May we diligently seek out those who, sensing their need, desire to receive blessing through the gospel.

9. "The same heard Paul speak: who steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed."

Those who "do the work of an evangelist" need to act as Paul did: (1) Have lost souls steadfastly on their heart and, (2) discern, by the Spirit, their true condition. Paul did both—he beheld the cripple's condition and perceived the reality of his faith.

10. "Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked."

Where reality of heart before God exists, blessing follows. It will be clearly a work of God. Physical rehabilitation, gradually learning to walk, did not heal the cripple. He immediately leaped and walked—giving clear evidence of a divine answer to faith.

11. "And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men."

They heard the gospel, but the Lycaonians had no faith and didn't see, as the cripple did, "Jesus only." They only saw "men as trees walking," their darkened, idolatrous hearts making men objects of worship.

12. "And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker."

In Antioch believers were scornfully called Christians (Acts 11:26). Here they are respectfully named after heathen gods. Bearing testimony to the true God and His Son, Jesus Christ, always brings opposition, whether by insult or flattery. But this is far more dangerous, for it exalts the Christian rather than the Christ—puts man in the place of God.

13. "Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people."

Man's religious leaders and his religion lead them to worship and serve "the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen." His false religion always leads man away from God, glorifying himself.

14. "Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out."

When the apostles were beaten and cast in prison, they sang hymns at midnight (Acts 16:23-25). But here they cry out, expressing their sorrow and grief that they were being made objects of worship, rather than the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a time for Christians to bear with suffering and a time to cry out against wickedness. God alone gives the wisdom to know when to sing out and when to cry out.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2002, Practical Reflections on Acts - 13:40-52 (13:40-52)

40-41. "Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you."

The Jews had received full and complete testimony through the prophets, from the Lord Jesus Himself, and now from His disciples of His person and work and of their guilt in rejecting the Messiah. Paul, having declared to them the truth, solemnly warns of the serious consequences of their rejections.

May we allow this same spirit of godly fear and reverence in reading the Old Testament Scriptures. They are part of the Word of God and, as such, contain vital principles which, if we are to be happy, must be put to practical use in our lives.

42. "And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath."

If God's people (the Jews) would not listen, there are still those who will (the Gentiles). Here we find a most vital principle: God will never disappoint earnest seekers of the truth. Oh! that we may earnestly seek and buy the precious truth of God, that we might daily walk in its divine light.

43-44. "Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God."

This is one of the manifest differences between keeping the law and continuing in the grace of God. The whole city desired to hear the Word of God.

The grace of God is a wonderful and deep subject. May we learn, in our measure, what His matchless grace has made us (sons of God) and where it has placed us (in boldness with confident access into the presence of God), that we might walk in the enjoyment of His divine love and favor.

45. "But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming."

When Jesus saw the multitude, "He was moved with compassion" (Matt. 9:36); when the Jews saw the multitude, they were filled with envy.

When Jesus saw the lame, blind, dumb, maimed multitude, He healed them (Matt. 15:30); the Jews withheld the very truth that would have healed.

When Jesus saw the hungry multitude, He "blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them" (Mark 6:41); the Jews blasphemed the truth which satisfies the heart.

This same spirit may overtake believers.

Do we envy a servant being used in blessing, criticizing his service rather than rejoicing?

Do we begrudge caring for the Lord's servants, resulting in hindering the truth that brings healing and comfort?

Do we allow spiritual jealousy of the way in which others are being used, resulting in spiritual starvation for the masses of hungry souls around us?

May God give each to prayerfully and unsparingly consider our spirits in view of these things.

46. "Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles."

Opposition did not discourage the Lord's servants. If He has given us a work to do, what does it matter if others don't encourage or understand our service? It is enough that He has bidden us serve Him.

47. "For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth."

Here we have the lovely, simple principle upon which each carries out his service for the Lord Jesus: "For so hath the Lord commanded us." Further, it was not just their personal desire; rather, they had the Lord's command for their service.

48. "And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."

What a contrast! Gladness and glorifying the Word of God, rather than contradicting and blaspheming the truth! Let us judge our hearts unsparingly before Him!

49. "And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region."

Blessing and liberty freely and abundantly flow where there is submission to the Word of God.

50. "But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts."

When faced with God's truth, which makes nothing of man, finding him lost, guilty and helpless (Eph. 2:1,5; Col. 1:21), cultural sophistication and political correctness quickly throw off their veneer of respectability, violently opposing the truth.

The elite of society—religious, benevolent, responsible people—are incited by the enemies of Christ to banish those who preached the "words of this life."

51-52. "But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost."

What a solemn condemnation of these who spurned and opposed the truth of God. The richest, highest levels of society were marked as condemned rejectors of the gospel by dust—the most insignificant thing in God's creation.

However, man's hatred and opposition of the gospel of the grace of God cannot touch either the joy of the disciples or the wonderful reality of the indwelling of the Spirit of God. May it be so with us that we be found praying, preaching and persevering, in spite of all the opposition which the enemy would use to discourage and turn us aside.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2001, Practical Reflections on Acts - 13:27-39 (13:27-39)

27-28. "For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew Him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him. And though they found no cause of death in Him, yet desired they Pilate that He should be slain."

What an indictment of mere religious knowledge! Human intelligence in the Word of God, apart from divine faith making personal application of it daily, is dangerous. The Jews were in the right place, had the right leaders, heard the right words, and observed the right days. But rather than receiving the Messiah, they fulfilled the prophetic word they knew so well, giving Him up to Roman crucifixion. Let's not only read the Word, but in faith and obedience act on it!

29. "And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulchre."

Wicked hands crucified the Creator; loving hands buried Him. In their inveterate hatred of the Christ and rebellion against God and His Word, these hardened, religious zealots could but fulfill divine prophecies foretelling their wicked deed. How important to willingly submit, by faith, to God's will and wisdom. Only in doing that will be found true joy and liberty.

30. "But God raised Him from the dead."

Whether as an act of hatred (crucifixion) or an act of loving honor (burial), man could do no more to the Saviour than allowed by God. However, God had the final and glorious word. His beloved Son rose victorious from among the dead. Let's make sure that we ever allow our loving God to have the last word in our lives.

31. "And He was seen many days of them which came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses unto the people."

He was seen! Oh! what a glorious word! Our blessed Savior was seen alive after He had risen from the dead—seen of “above five hundred brethren” at one time (1 Cor. 15:6). Faith believes the Word of God and sees Jesus “crowned with glory and honor” at God’s right hand (Heb. 1:3; 2:9). May we witness by our ways and words that our Lord and Saviour is risen.

32-33. “And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee.”

Paul, directed by the Spirit of God, beautifully uses the Old Testament Scriptures (here especially the psalms of David) to preach the resurrection of Jesus from among the dead. The Lord Himself said, “They are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39).

God “raised up Jesus” that all His promises might be fulfilled in Christ, who was the “only begotten Son” born into this world. Never would they be altered or negated by man’s wicked deed.

How sweet to claim the promises of God given us in the Scriptures—to be able by faith to say, “I have got that thing!” God never makes a promise that He cannot or will not keep.

34. “And as concerning that He raised Him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, He said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.”

Not only was the Lord Jesus raised up to fulfill all the promises of God, but He was raised up from the dead, having no longer ever to say anything to the awful but defeated foe, death, which He conquered at Calvary.

35. “Wherfore He saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption.”

Another has said, “The Son of God became the Son of Man that the sons of men might become the sons of God.” The Lord Jesus was very God, yet fully man. Our finite minds cannot understand this, but we humbly bow to its majestic truth, knowing that though He died and was buried, yet His blessed body saw no corruption before rising from among the dead. The Lord fully and forever won the victory over death and the grave, and believers now share in wonderful liberty as children of God possessing His very life—eternal life. “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (1 Cor. 15:55).

36-37. “For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: but He, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.”

Those who rejected Jesus of Nazareth (the true Son of David) had immense national pride in David, their glorious warrior king. But he who won mighty victories for the people of God had no power to defeat man’s final foe, death. After fulfilling the will of God in serving his generation, David slept and his body saw corruption.

Yet, the Messiah, great David’s greater Son, whom the Jews had rejected and desired to be crucified, not only held the power over death and hell (hades—the grave), but God, showing His full satisfaction and delight in His beloved Son’s atoning work at Calvary, raised Him from among the dead.

38. “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.”

Paul does not say that through the Son of God forgiveness of sins was preached to the Jews, but through this Man—the humble, lowly, rejected Jesus of Nazareth, the Man of Sorrows. This One that they had despised and cast out was the only means of having their sins forgiven.

May we make much of the Man Christ Jesus, honoring Him in all we do and say. “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life” (Phil. 2:15-16).

39. “And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.”

Not only were they intensely proud of David, but they boasted in the law given to them through Moses. Neither had power to give what they so desperately needed—full, free justification before God. “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14).

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2001, Practical Reflections on Acts - 13:13-26 (13:13-26)

13. “Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.”

The Lord tests the reality of our desire to serve Him—not to discourage or turn us aside, but to strengthen and purify, while showing us that our “strength is made perfect in weakness” (see Mal. 3:3; 2 Cor. 12:9).

“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him” (James 1:12). John Mark followed Paul and Barnabas as their minister—though he was not specifically called by the Spirit as

they. His faith and exercise are tested and do not seem able to endure—to meet the opposition of a Bar-jesus. Happily, he is later restored to useful service (2 Tim. 4:11).

14-15. "But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on."

Paul, carrying the gospel to the Jew first, shows a lovely attitude of humility. Though sent on a special mission by the Spirit of God, the beloved Apostle does not force himself on the Jews in the synagogue. He and Barnabas sit down and wait until the Spirit, by moving the rulers to invite them to share a word, gives liberty for them to preach. May we always seek the Spirit's leading in preaching the gospel and ministering—whether in season or out of season.

16. "Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience."

What Paul was about to share did not come from a casual spirit of indifference. His heart, yearning for his people's blessing, causes him to express those feelings by reaching out with his hand, imploring, inviting them to listen. Let us, with the same heartfelt longing, preach and live the gospel today.

17. "The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with a high arm brought He them out of it."

We find in these verses a wonderful pattern of Christian exhortation (1 Cor. 14:3; 1 Tim. 4:13). First, Paul reminds them of God's grace shown towards the nation of Israel and then of the power He used on their behalf.

18. "And about the time of forty years suffered He their manners in the wilderness."

Next, in exhortation, there is remembrance made of human failure and His ceaseless divine patience.

19. "And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, He divided their land to them by lot."

Exhortation reminds us that it is His divine strength which gives victory over the enemy and His divine love that gives such wonderful blessings.

Let us be exercised (Heb. 10:25) to allow this pattern to guide our exhortations, that true Christian growth and blessing might result.

20-21. "And after that He gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years."

God's desire for man's blessing is clearly shown. Having given to His beloved people the land of Canaan, though they failed, Jehovah raised up deliverers (judges), and when they too failed, He raised up Samuel, who as a prophet brought the mind of God to them. Still unthankful, they said, "Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Sam. 8:5).

God gave them their request—King Saul—"but sent leanness into their soul" (Psa. 106:15). How solemn to repeatedly reject divine exhortations (no matter who the channel God uses may be), following instead a path of self-will and disobedience.

22. "And when He had removed him, He raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also He gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after Mine own heart, which shall fulfill all My will."

Saul (a picture of the flesh) fulfilled his own will in opposition to the will of God. But one man was found who answered to the heart of God. Though there was failure (as we all fail), David's heart was fully set to do God's will. David's life presents a lovely picture of that one perfect Man, Christ Jesus, who alone could say, "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29). May we, in our measure, ever be found walking in submission to His perfect will.

23-24. "Of this man's seed hath God, according to His promise, raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus: when John had first preached before His coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel."

What blessing comes from submission to the will of God! Though David rightly calls Him Lord, Messiah was to come of the royal line of David (see Matt. 22:42-46). We also see what blessing could have resulted in Israel had the leaders repented at John's preaching. How vitally important is repentance, both for present and eternal blessing!

25-26. "And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not He. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of His feet I am not worthy to loose. Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent."

The one whom the Lord Jesus called the greatest prophet born of women (see Luke 7:28) manifests a morally fitting attitude of humility when referring to Messiah. Today among professing Christians there is a very sad lack of reverence for the Lord Jesus and of holy fear of God. May we become, in our spirits and ways, more like John, who evaluated everything in view of the glorious person of the Son of God.

Paul's message reaches beyond the bounds of the stock of Abraham to any who feared God. "By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honor, and life" (Prov. 22:4).

Ed.

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

No assembly, no group of gifted brethren decided what service Barnabas and Saul should undertake. But fellowship was expressed with those the Spirit of God had called to this special ministry.

The mind of the Lord was not casually found. The five "prophets and teachers" at Antioch were completely occupied with serving the Lord. Do we sometimes wonder at the seeming lack of power in our prayers and blessing in our lives? Perhaps if believers knew a bit more of fasting we would also know more of His blessing in our individual, family and assembly lives.

3. "And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away [they let them go—JND]."

Though the servant of the Lord is directly responsible to the One who calls him to service (Rom. 14:4), let's not lose an important principle found in this passage. Barnabas and Saul did not leave on their appointed mission until there had been fasting and prayer for them and fellowship expressed with them. How happy when a servant of the Lord is the object of such earnest prayers and the fellowship of those who know him well.

The brethren did not send Barnabas and Saul on this service; that was the work of the Spirit of God. But they did submit to the Spirit's leading and were given liberty of conscience to let them go. There is no suggestion of an independent spirit with them.

4. "So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus."

All service rendered for Christ, if it is to bear fruit, must be led by the Spirit of God and originate from communion with Christ (John 15:4).

5. "And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister."

At this point, the Word of God is still being preached to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile. Until the church was formed at Pentecost (and for some little time after), the synagogues and the temple represented the places where worship (the temple) could be offered to the true God and the truth of God could be learned (synagogues).

It was fitting that as the apostles first went forth with the gospel, they identified with the places where the true God was known. How careful we must be not to connect divine truth with anything that dishonors our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

Though not called to preach the gospel, John Mark was to serve the servants! How many things can be done to help those called to preach the gospel or those engaged in other service for Him.

6. "And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus."

The Lord's work and His servants are immediately opposed by Satan, through one of his servants, Bar-jesus. May the Lord grant us courage to continue our appointed labor in the face of the enemy's attacks. The particular character of opposition here is striking. There was apparent power (sorcerer), understanding (prophet) of God's mind, association with God (Jew), and apparent love for Christ (Bar-jesus). But in reality, all was false.

Much that passes as truth today in professing Christianity is, in reality, the work of the enemy of souls. How careful and dependent on the Lord for wisdom and guidance we must be in our service!

7. "Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God."

Sergius Paulus called for the apostles—a proof that their actions and words had made a favorable impact on this upright man. But it was not by the efforts of the apostles that this happy result was accomplished, but by the Spirit working in his heart.

8. "But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith."

Bar-jesus (meaning "son of Jesus") was his name in relation to his seeking to confuse the pure gospel truth of God. Elymas (meaning wise man) was his name in the character of seeking to turn away, by false reasoning, an earnest, seeking soul. Satan uses both today—religion and reason to turn aside souls from the truth of God.

9-10. "Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?"

The Spirit records that Saul ("desired") is henceforth to be known as Paul ("little"). Acceptable service for the Lord Jesus must begin with the realization that the flesh, no matter how desirable, can never please or serve God acceptably (Rom. 8:8).

Humility is vital for discerning the enemy's attempts to pervert the gospel, as well as for receiving power to overcome such efforts.

11. "And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand."

The Jewish false prophet comes under God's governmental judgment of blindness "for a season"—an apt picture of the nation of Israel. Today, those who knowingly, willingly turn away from the light and wisdom of God's Word will sadly taste the same fate—morally blind—"ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

12. "Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord."

Once again works are connected with words. Sergius Paulus's amazement at the teaching of the Lord came from the Spirit's power displayed in the apostles' actions. May our lives adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2001, Practical Reflections on Acts: Acts 12:13-13:1 (12:13-25)

13. "And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda."

Rhoda lovingly and faithfully fulfilled a service that the rest might continue in prayer. Are we fulfilling faithfully what the Lord has called us to do, no matter how insignificant it might seem?

14. "And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate."

We see more lovely qualities in dear Rhoda. She knew Peter's voice—had evidently listened to his ministry and was familiar with the beloved Apostle.

His voice made her glad, for she had learned to love and appreciate this dear servant of Christ.

She ran to tell the others—carrying out her service heartily as unto the Lord.

She maintained proper submission, not taking it upon herself to open the door, but simply to notify others, leaving that decision to them.

15. "And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel."

Rhoda's spirit is as lovely as her energy of service! When rebuked and ridiculed for telling what she knew to be the truth, she does not become discouraged or angry. She continues speaking the truth in love and the result is that they begin to heed her words.

16. "But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished."

Had the unopened door discouraged Peter so that he went away, the unbelief of those who refused Rhoda's testimony would have been confirmed. So, too, Christians need never fear the results of proclaiming and defending the truth of God.

17. "But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go show these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place."

Earlier (vs. 5) the whole assembly had been engaged in earnest prayer for Peter. Here we find that some (James and the brethren) were not present. Yet, individuals still, out of love for Peter and faith in the Lord, continued a household prayer meeting. And it is to them that the joy of seeing Peter restored to liberty is granted. Oh! may we know more of earnest, fervent prayer—individually and collectively!

18-19. "Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Cæsarea, and there abode."

It is the heartless and wicked ruler Herod who is in authority over the Jews—whom the Jews received in place of the Messiah whom they crucified. What awful consequences result when man rejects God's best!

20. "And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country."

Fearing the angry despot Herod (with good reason!), those of Tyre and Sidon seek friendship with his closest advisor, Blastus. Their country was nourished by the king's country. But they feared and were concerned about the wrong king!

The blessed Saviour moved in that very region of Tyre and Sidon. How often He had dispensed blessing, met needs, and healed the sick. But in their fear of Herod, they forgot the One who was God manifest in flesh (1 Tim. 3:16)—that true Friend who sticketh closer than a brother (Prov. 18:24)—as they sought to gain favor with a tyrant.

How is it with us? We who have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ are eternally blessed. Too often, in principle, we too behave out of fear of the world, seeking to order our lives to gain its approval, rather than to trust our loving God.

21-22. "And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man."

We see the sad result of the fear of man. To these frightened people it brought the snare of idolatry.

23. "And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost."

Though it may not always happen so strikingly, God always vindicates His glory and the glory of His well-beloved Son. At the same time, He nullifies man's haughty pride, using the lowliest of means.

Immediately smitten by God, the oppressor feared by man (but not feared by worms) dies.

24. "But the word of God grew and multiplied."

While the enemy wasted away in death, the Word that he had tried to stamp out abounded in growth.

25. "And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark."

This verse represents a very important point in the history of the church (assembly) in Acts. Save for one further time in Acts 15, Peter is not again mentioned. The early Jewish character of the assembly in Jerusalem is slowly fading, while its proper Gentile character takes the prominent place.

We will now begin to see, almost exclusively, the work, not of Peter or the other apostles at Jerusalem, but rather the labors of the Apostle Paul as recorded by the Spirit. And, too, we will notice that the Gentile assembly at Antioch becomes much more prominent as the place from which the blessing of the gospel of God's grace flows out to the Jew and the Gentile.

Chapter 13

1. "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul."

Two spiritual gifts are specifically connected with this first Gentile assembly—prophets and teachers. It is instructive to see their order—prophets first, then teachers. The prophet brings the mind of God to the people of God, applying the truth of God to their special conditions and circumstances. While being taught is important (2 Tim. 2:12), having the mind of God for each circumstance of life is vital.

Oh! the blessing that comes from those who have an "understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chron. 12:32)—who, in communion with God, are able to reveal His mind for the present circumstances through which the assembly collectively and the believer individually pass.

May each willingly hear the prophets speak "to edification, and exhortation, and comfort" (1 Cor. 14:3).

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2001, Practical Reflections on Acts - 11:29-12:12 (11:29-30)

29. "Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea."

The first Gentile assembly endeavors "to keep the unity of the Spirit" (Eph. 4:3). The believers at Antioch received a message from the Lord through His servant (Agabus; vs. 28). They act in the Spirit and on the principle of the one body by sending financial aid to their brethren in Jerusalem.

None was required to give. The grace of God acting on each heart according as God had prospered (1 Cor. 16:2) each individual was the guide for giving. This is our guide as well.

30. "Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul."

All was done "decently and in order." The elders in Jerusalem, bearing local administrative responsibility, had charge of distributing the funds. Great care must be used in the handling and distribution of funds among brethren. How important that those who carry moral weight (see 1 Tim. 3:8:13) faithfully fulfill this service. "Giving no offence in anything, that the ministry be not blamed" (2 Cor. 6:3).

Chapter 12

13. "Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)"

Satan had tried in various ways to destroy the early assembly (see Acts 4:14; 5:1-11; 6:17; 8:3 as examples). He now turns his fury on two specially prominent servants—James and Peter. The Lord, in perfect wisdom, allows James, like Stephen, to receive the martyr's crown. Herod plans the same fate for Peter. Do we earnestly, continually pray for those who have been placed by God in prominent positions in the assembly? How needful to do this, for they are special targets of attack by the enemy.

4. "And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter [passover—JND translation] to bring him forth to the people."

Do we know of a believer—a brother or sister in Christ—under special attack of the enemy? Perhaps circumstances or discouragements have morally placed that one—beloved and redeemed of the Lord—in prison—their having lost that wonderful liberty in Christ (Gal. 5:1) to serve Him. The enemy will use his four quaternions of soldiers to keep such a one in bondage. Faith, however, counts on God's deliverance, for with Him nothing is impossible.

5. "Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him."

Peter could do nothing about his circumstances. But there was one thing that the assembly could do—engage in instant and earnest prayer. As another has said, "Prayer is a mighty engine." Oh! the infinite, divine power that is put in motion through effectual, fervent prayer. Let us avail ourselves, individually and collectively, of this divine force. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17).

6. "And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison."

Peter is at rest—he has no fear of death, for to him to depart and be with Christ was far better. Only faith can give such peace (Isa. 26:3).

But let us learn from moral warnings found here. There are four conditions which kept this dear servant from carrying out his ministry—the same which may keep any believer from serving Him. (1) He was asleep, (2) soldiers (a picture of the world's power) were guarding him, (3) he was bound with chains (a picture of the results of disobedience in a believer's life) and (4) keepers (picturing Satan seeking to deny a believer the joy of his Christian liberty) were guarding the door of the prison.

Of course, there is no hint here of personal failure in dear Peter. But the moral principles contained in this passage are often found when a believer has wandered from the Lord. Peter was beyond human help—but not beyond the power of prayer. Let us never cease to earnestly cry to our God on behalf of those who have strayed away from the Lord.

7. "And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands."

It is a wonderful comfort to know that our Lord can go where we cannot. Satan has no power or authority over the One who went to the cross that "He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14).

Light marks the beginning of restoration. It was so in Genesis 1:2 when "darkness was upon the face of the deep." At times we may feel that smiting is necessary to restore an erring one. Let's leave that to the Lord! Our part is to pray for, not to smite, a wayward saint.

The sleeping prisoner, now aroused and having light, finds that the chains once binding him are no longer holding him captive. What liberty repentance and restoration bring to the child of God!

8. "And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me."

The Lord takes away the prison garment and restores the garment that had been lost. His instructions to Peter are to gird himself and follow. This is the only safe path for believers—characterized by obedience and submission, our sandals bound on that we no longer stumble in the path of faith.

9. "And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision."

What little value our thoughts have in the Lord's gracious and faithful dealings with His own. Let us trust His ways of wisdom, not our thoughts.

10. "When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him."

Only one way (one street) back to fellowship with the Lord for the prisoner—that is repentance. When it is real, Satan's iron gate cannot keep a restored child from the happy liberty that is his in Christ.

11. "And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews."

Peter, finished thinking and fully awake, now knows the reality of what the Lord has done for him. He knows that God has delivered him from the enemy. What a joy to say with the psalmist, "This I know; for God is for me" (Psa. 56:9), and with the Apostle, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). No matter what the failure, a child of God can, with confidence, always say the same.

12. "And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying."

Peter, having been set at liberty, goes to his own company—a dependent, praying company. This is always the fruit of true restoration in a soul. There will be a desire to be found in fellowship with those of "like precious faith"—those very brethren who have earnestly prayed (and continue to do so) for the wanderer.

Ed.

18. "When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."

A happy proof of divine life! Even the strong Jewish prejudices of these brethren from Jerusalem were subdued when they realized that the blessing had gone out to the Gentiles, and it was most surely a work of God. Their happy submission to the will and work of God had equally happy results—peace, quietness and praise being offered to God. May we earnestly covet this same spirit with one another!

19. "Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only."

Though Peter and the believers at Jerusalem had realized that God had opened the door of blessing to the Gentiles, other believers who had fled there had not heard. They remained faithful to what they knew, so that as godly Jews they preached to the Jews only. God desires that each believer act according to the light they have. In doing so, more light will then be given.

20. "And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus."

The gospel of the grace of God cannot be contained. National prejudice, Scriptural ignorance, religious persecution—none of these things can stop the good news from being preached to the lost. In the very place where the first Gentile assembly was established, the gospel is preached. Let us, gathered to the precious name of the Lord Jesus Christ, never give up the precious privilege and the vital importance of preaching the gospel—wherever we live.

21. "And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord."

When the Lord is in the work, great blessing is sure to result. We also learn that believing is not enough. There was an appropriate action which followed their faith in the message they heard—they turned to the Lord. Let us see to it that the reality of our Christian faith is, in like manner, proven by our actions.

22. "Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch."

The brethren at Jerusalem prove the working of the grace of God among them that began with Peter's visit to Cornelius. Then they had waited until Peter came to them at Jerusalem. When he arrived, he was chided for having contact with Gentiles. But now, upon receiving the happy report of the Spirit's working among Gentiles in Antioch, they send a brother (who has their moral confidence) to help. Barnabas was not going as an evangelist, for then he, as Philip (see Acts 8), would have moved as guided only by the Spirit of God.

But what happened in Antioch affected the assembly in Jerusalem. Those who administered there sent one of their own with explicit restrictions. Such fellowship and interaction is needed among brethren today when such issues arise.

23. "Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord."

Barnabas, realizing that God was working, begins shepherding by encouraging and building up the new flock of God. May we never lose sense of the critical value of fatherly care among brethren—whether it be the babes in Christ or mature believers. Encouraging, shepherding ministry is desperately needed today among God's dear people.

24. "For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord."

Here we have the qualifications of one who desires to build up believers and assemblies—and we have the happy result of such service, but not a word about gift. The Spirit of God mightily uses a servant who walks righteously and in faith.

25. "Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul."

This shepherd recognizes that the sheep need more than he had—he was "diligent to know the state of [the] flocks" (Prov. 27:23). Barnabas knows of one who had been raised up of God for this very purpose and immediately leaves to find Saul. His official service for the assembly at Jerusalem in no way impedes his desire to find a vessel that could be used in greater blessing among these new converts. May we display this same sweet spirit—recognizing and using gifts that God has given to others, for the blessing of His beloved sheep.

26. "And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."

These two faithful men teach the assembly at Antioch the doctrines of Christianity. Though Saul took the lead, Barnabas gave adequate witness to the truth of his words (2 Cor. 13:1).

27. "And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch."

The assembly at Jerusalem proves a source of blessing to the new assembly in Antioch. It ought to be so with assemblies today—able to provide the needed blessing and balance lacking in another.

28. "And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar."

Another gift is sent to help the assembly at Antioch—a prophet. As mightily used as Barnabas and Saul had been, they gave place to one who had a ministry from the Lord to fulfill. Are we willing to do the same?

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2001, Practical Reflections on Acts - 11:1-17 (11:1-17)

1. "And the apostles and brethren that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God."

What a wonderful report! The Gentiles, who by nature had no claims on divine blessing, submitted to and obeyed God's Word. This is the only hope of blessing for man—total submission to God's Word.

2-3. "And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them."

Sad spiritual intolerance! To these legalistic Jewish believers, the law given by Moses and Israel's promised place of blessing as head over the Gentiles were of more importance than the sovereign grace of God. Their religious prejudices caused them to chide Peter rather than rejoice with him.

4. "But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying."

The spirit of grace shines beautifully in Peter. He does not rebuke or argue with those who are contentious, nor does the beloved Apostle seek to mollify these legalistic brethren by sharing only the least controversial parts of the account. He expounds in order everything, exactly as it happened.

5-6. "I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air."

What a wonderful principle! Peter's account begins with prayer. While in this vitally important attitude of dependence, Peter received divine communication. Though others may misunderstand our lives, we may walk in confidence before God in the measure in which we first kneel before Him in prayer to hear His blessed voice.

7-8. "And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth."

Peter was not trying to impress his Jewish brethren with his faithfulness. He had acted in the fear of God, seeking to please the Lord in his life, and thus could say with good conscience that nothing unclean had entered his mouth. May we seek to walk daily before our Lord with a good conscience.

9-10. "But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven."

Hearing this, those opposing Peter ought to have realized that it was God Himself, not the Apostle, with whom they were contending. It was His sovereign will to cleanse the common, giving full witness (three times). How we need to discern His mind in every detail of our lives. Knowing His will makes the path of faith clear and simple.

11-12. "And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Cæsarea unto me. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house."

When God is working, there is no hesitancy. The seeking Gentiles were immediately at Peter's dwelling. Peter's obedience gave him peace ("nothing doubting") through the Spirit for his pathway.

We then see a most important principle acted upon. Though fully assured by the vision and by the leading of the Spirit, Peter does not go alone. He takes six brethren with him. "In the multitude of counselors there is safety." How important that the Lord's servants never set themselves or their service above the counsel and fellowship of their brethren!

13-14. "And he showed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved."

In the day of grace, the Gentiles, like the Jews, receive direct, divine communications. But, though the assembly had been formed, for the moment God still used His earthly people as the channel of blessing. Cornelius was told, however, to call not for Scribes or Pharisees, but for Peter—one who lived by faith. This strikingly illustrates the principle that without faith it is impossible to please God.

Let us remember that today God and His truth can only be revealed and known through Christianity. What a responsibility and privilege! May the glorious light of God shine ever brightly in our lives. "Let your light so shine before men" (Matt. 5:16).

15. "And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning."

God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34)—Peter had realized this when in Cornelius's house. The Jews' former place of divine, earthly favor was now no longer in force. What had happened to those 120 Jewish believers at Pentecost now happened to Cornelius and his Gentile company. There was no difference in the way the Spirit came upon them nor in the results of that divine indwelling. "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him" (Rom. 10:12).

16. "Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that He said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost."

How sad to see dear believers today still bound to John's baptism—one which was for the Jews and was to repentance of the sin and failure of God's earthly people. The Holy Spirit formed an entirely new thing—the body of Christ—by His baptism.

17. "Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?"

Here's a question with only one possible answer—one which by the Spirit was calculated to touch the hearts of the brethren to whom Peter was speaking.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2001, Practical Reflections on Acts: Acts 10:28-48 (10:5-48)

28. "And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean."

Peter was a faithful, righteous Jew. Nothing could have induced him to defile himself by being found in company of Gentiles—except "God hath showed me." To God alone Peter submitted. We ought also always to submit to His wisdom, even at times when things naturally seem opposed to His Word.

29. "Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?"

The Word of God settled everything with Peter. He didn't understand what was happening, but God had given him a command, and without hesitation or reasoning, he obeyed. This is the way to blessing in our lives—immediate, unquestioned obedience to God.

30-32. "And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee."

Cornelius was an earnest seeker. He was willing to lay aside his natural desires (he fasted and prayed) in order to know the mind of God. God will never disappoint such faith. He sends instructions to Cornelius which will bring the peace he so desires.

33. "Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."

Unlike Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2) who demanded, upon threat of death, the interpretation of his dream, Cornelius makes no attempt to use his position of power and authority to demand anything of Peter. What a beautiful spirit—"Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth"! May we ever have this spirit before Him.

34-35. "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him."

Peter's understanding is now opened. Such understanding of God's ways is the result of obedience to Him. Peter further learns that a true heart walking in the fear of God, not a privileged position, is the key to divine blessing.

36-37. "The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (He is Lord of all:) that word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached."

Peter begins his message with the Lord Jesus, giving Him His rightful place as Lord of all. Though it was published in all Judea, the Gentiles well knew its testimony, for they too had heard the message of John the Baptist (see Luke 3:14). Now, years after his death, John's message is still bearing fruit. How happy when a believer's life has been such that he "being dead yet speaketh" (Heb. 11:4).

38. "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him."

That despised name carries infinite power unknown to man. In an earlier day, Nicodemus gave this same testimony: "No man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with Him" (John 3:2). It's wonderful for mankind to realize that God is with Him—far more precious to know this lowly, blessed Jesus is "Emmanuel . . . God with us."

39. "And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree."

Here is the measure of the awful depth of man's alienation from God: That One who went about doing good was judged worthy to be slain upon a tree. Oh that we might ever recognize the total moral ruin of sinful man who would willingly slay His Creator who loves him!

40. "Him God raised up the third day, and showed Him openly."

What an infinitely grand and glorious vindication! The worst man could do to God's beloved Son is answered in His victorious resurrection from among the dead. For the believer, the Lord's glorious resurrection has flooded this dark valley of the shadow of death with divine light and joy.

41. "Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead."

What an awesome experience! Cornelius, his household and friends, sat in the very presence of a person who had seen, talked to and been with the Lord Jesus after He rose from the dead. Even so, they must believe Peter's testimony by faith. We have something even better—God's eternal Word. But it must be received and believed by faith.

42. "And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead."

Peter, preaching a risen Christ to the Gentiles, was being obedient to the Lord's command. Are we being likewise obedient to our Lord Jesus? "If ye love Me, keep My commandments."

43-44. "To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word."

The Spirit of God acts—confirming the truth of Peter's words—on those who had come to hear. Unlike those in Matthew 13:13 who heard but did not understand because of unbelief, these Gentiles, because they believed, received the truth they heard.

45. "And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost."

The reality of this work astonished the Jewish believers. How much better if it had given them joy.

46-48. "For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days."

Here is simple proof that baptism is not necessary for salvation. Though these Gentiles were already baptized with the Spirit, we see it is God's mind that they take the public position of Christianity through water baptism. They desire to learn more of the Lord, as is normal where there is a true work of God.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 2001, Practical Reflections on Acts - 9:32-10:4 (10:1-4)

32. "And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda."

For the time being, Saul passes off the scene, leaving Peter to fulfill the commission given him by the Lord Jesus: "feed My lambs . . . shepherd My sheep" (JND). He who had been unfaithful to His Lord now faithfully visits the believers of "all quarters." Lydda ("Lod" in the Hebrew) means "travail; strife." The work of shepherding among God's dear people often involves bringing peace where strife exists.

33-34. "And there he found a certain man named Eneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. And Peter said unto him, Eneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately."

Where there is strife among God's people, there is inability to walk in strength and liberty for God's glory. What a joy it must have been to dear Eneas to be delivered from his helpless condition! Now, rather than being a servant to his bed, the blessed name of Jesus Christ has caused the former cripple to be an overcomer. Oh! that God's dear people, overcoming all bitterness and strife, would be found walking in peace one with another (Eph. 4:31-32).

35. "And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord."

Again the principle of doing before speaking is presented. It was not what people heard Eneas say, but rather what they saw in his changed life that caused them to turn to the Lord. What wonderful blessing results when brethren endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3).

36. "Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did."

Whether viewed by the word (Dorcas) or by the people of God (Tabitha), this disciple was the same—full of good works and almsdeeds. What a sermon her life preached to all who knew her!

Tabitha's name means "roe." The gazelle (roe) is mentioned several times in the Old Testament as possessing characteristics that ought to be morally displayed in believers. It is a clean animal (Deut. 14:5 JND). Its walk is graceful (2 Sam. 2:18) and sure (Song of Sol. 2:9). Its appearance is beautiful (Prov. 5:19). It hides itself from danger (Prov. 6:5). It symbolizes undivided affections (Song of Sol. 7:3), and it dwells in separation from the world (Song of Sol. 8:14). Oh that believers—as Tabitha—might be full of good works.

37. "And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber."

The beautiful spirit of loving, gracious care for one another, which Tabitha morally represents, is ever in danger of weakening and dying out among Christians. In a day when the love of many shall wax cold (Matt. 24:12), we must guard against such a thing happening, individually or collectively.

38. "And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them."

How wonderful that those brethren who had suffered such loss were near another assembly that had the means to encourage, comfort and help them. Let us see to it that we are ever close enough to one another to be able to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2).

39. "Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them."

The beneficial results of Dorcas's ministry, which had provided for the needs of the helpless, is publicly displayed. How wonderful if our service is found to provide garments of comfort for our dear brethren—those whom Christ loves—who are in need. "Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees" (Heb. 12:12).

40-41. "But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive."

Seven beautiful moral principles are found in Tabitha's restoration to life. The servant discerns the Lord's will apart from human sentiment ("Peter put them all forth"), acts in dependence on God ("kneeled down, and prayed"), speaks the Lord's mind ("Tabitha, arise"), provides guidance for the restored ("when she saw Peter, she sat up"), identifies in personal fellowship with the restored ("gave her his hand"), strengthens the faith of the restored ("lifted her up"), and, finally, brings the restored back to the bosom of the assembly ("presented her alive [to the saints and widows]").

42-43. "And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner."

Simon Peter quietly remains in a humble dwelling for many days until His blessed Master again calls him to service. The servant is hidden, while the ministry he was called to continues to reap fruit.

Chapter 10

12. "There was a certain man in Cæsarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always."

Blessing had already gone beyond Jerusalem, reaching into Samaria (Acts 8). Now it goes even further, reaching to a Gentile—one who, like the Ethiopian eunuch, though earnest in heart, had found no lasting peace or blessing in Judaism.

3. "He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius."

Cornelius worshipped God from an honest, reverent heart. Yet, like the Ethiopian eunuch, he did not really know that One he worshipped. But now he finds that God knows and cares about him.

4. "And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God."

Though it is not normal for a believer to be afraid of the Lord, until a quickened soul rests fully in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, this is often its experience.

Ed.

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