

COUNSEL

**THE LORD JESUS CHRIST:
VILIFIED AND VINDICATED**

FEED THE FLOCK OF GOD

LESSONS FROM AN OLD TESTAMENT PARABLE (PART 2)

THE PRIESTHOOD OF NEW TESTAMENT BELIEVERS

LETTER TO EPHESUS

THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE

THE HEAD COVERING

WHY DID JESUS COME TO THIS PLANET?

March – April 2006

FEED THE FLOCK OF GOD

The Lord commissioned Peter to “*feed my sheep*”. Later Peter himself would exhort elders or shepherds of God’s people to do likewise: “*Feed the flock of God which is among you,*” (1 Pet. 5:2). The importance of the care and feeding of God’s people cannot be overemphasized. One of the ways God cares for His people is through those who He has gifted and equipped for this ministry. Such feeding necessarily includes the Word of God. “*Preach the word*” Paul exhorts young Timothy in the face of Paul’s own departure out of this world and the departure from spiritual things by professing believers in the last days. “*And now, brethren, I commend 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*” (Acts 20:32) are Paul’s words of comfort and challenge to the elders of Ephesus.

That the people of God need to be fed by the word of God should be evident to all. And yet the responsibility to be a feeder of God’s people seems enormous. Those who attempt to discharge this duty soon realize the immensity of the task. Paul calls believers to pay special honour to elders “*who labour in the word and doctrine*” (1 Tim. 5:17). Labouring in the word and doctrine will require toil and work. The meaning of the word ‘labour’ is to toil to the

point of feeling fatigue. Study of the Scripture will demand effort of the highest level and extensive sacrifice on the part of those willing to do it. If one is going to follow the Lord’s command to ‘*feed my sheep*’ there is no other way. Are there those among God’s people who are willing to do this?

But happily for us, in this service of the Lord, while it will demand and tax us, there is also an abundant supply given us. Those who feed are not on their own. A friend recently pointed out to me this valuable lesson from John 6. You may recall it is the account of the feeding of the five thousand. Here too people needed to be fed. Here too the task was enormous. The Lord Himself asked the disciples thought provoking questions about the situation showing the impossibility of them supplying the need in themselves. It is here we learn a vital lesson in the feeding of God’s people. Here is John’s record:

“And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would” (John 6:10-11).

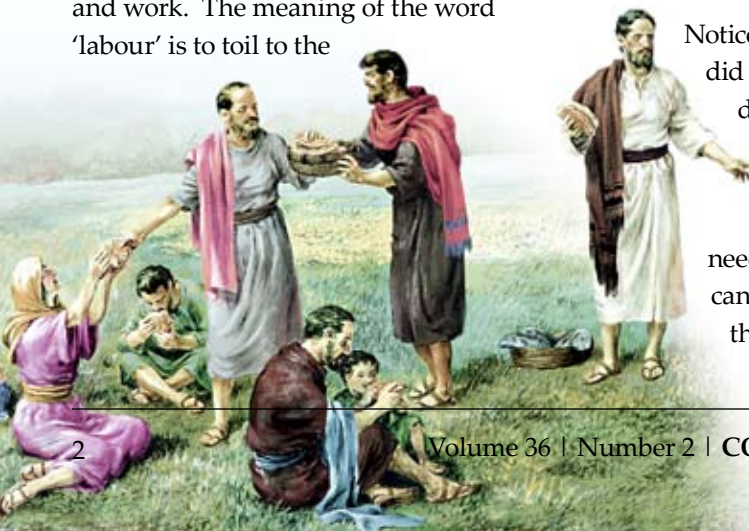
Notice firstly the disciples did what they could do, they could “*make the men sit down*”. So too feeders of God’s people need to do what they can do. It will mean the ordering of one’s

time and schedule to be available to feed the people of God. But here is the next crucial part. The Lord distributed bread to the disciples and they in turn distributed it to the people. If we are to feed the people of God we must be fed ourselves. This extends to all of God’s people for there is a sense in which all of us feed others, not just elders or preachers or Bible teachers. Whether in private conversation or public preaching, if we are to truly be a help to one another we need to be strong and learn to be fed from the Lord Himself in His Word. As He feeds us, so we can feed others. This will mean spending time regularly in prayer and reading His Word that He might speak to us. It will mean turning off the ever present electronic invasion of our time, that we might hear His voice. It will sometimes mean isolating ourselves from constant activity that we might have time to think over His Word.

Feeling overtaxed in the care of God’s people? Feeling incapable of meeting the need? Do not forget, the Lord continues to distribute to disciples that they in turn might feed others. Look to Him and He will provide.

Feeding the flock of God. It is vital, essential, something that must be done. Humanly speaking, an impossible task, were it not for the provision of our Lord who continues to distribute the bread of His Word to those who are willing to receive it. “*He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; ... as much as they would*” (John 6:11).

Brian Gunning
St. Catharines, Ontario





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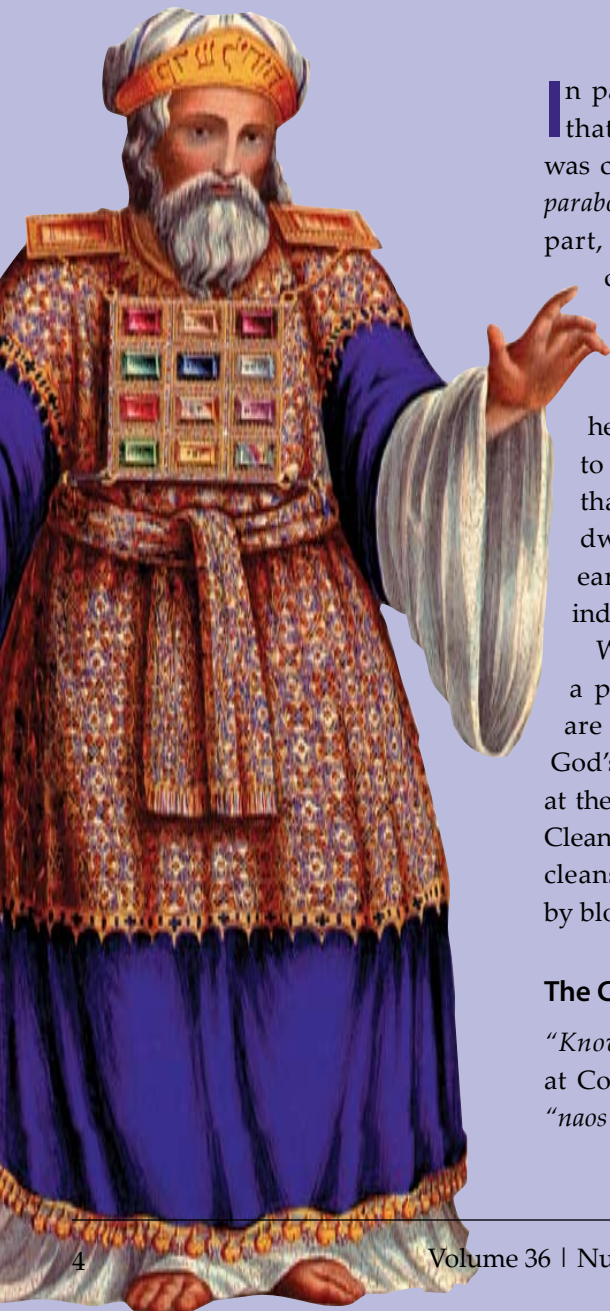
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LESSONS FROM AN OLD TESTAMENT PARABLE THE TABERNACLE PART 2

Here we learn the truth that we are not only holy when we get to heaven or are “in the church,” but seven days a week and 24 hours a day; for we are the holy place of God wherever we go.



In part one of our study, we saw that God’s tabernacle-sanctuary was called a figure or parable (Gk. *parabole*) (Heb. 9:9). In the second part, we considered the tabernacle-sanctuary called the holy places in which the living God resided. We saw the holy places represented heaven and what was necessary to enter in. We mentioned also that they represent where God dwells today in His temple on earth, the church, and also our individual bodies as believers.

We discovered that before a priest (of which all believers are today, 1 Pet. 2:5, 9) entered God’s sanctuary they had to stop at the altar and laver for cleansing. Cleansing from the guilt of sin and cleansing to be made presentable by blood and water.

The Church

“Know ye not that ye [the church at Corinth, 1:2] are the temple [Gk. “naos” holy sanctuary] of God, and

that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16).

Since entrance into the holy places of the tabernacle was preceded by two pieces of furniture in the courtyard where cleansing took place, the parabolic lesson is: what has to precede entrance into God’s presence? Not only can one not come into heaven itself without cleansing, but neither is the church fellowship for the unclean.

The church is to be a microcosm of heaven for it is His holy place on earth today. In heaven there are four living creatures that rest not day and night saying, *“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come”* even as you read now this is happening in heaven (Rev. 4:8).

The key feature of the church, which is His temple, is not happiness but holiness. Some might think concerning the church, *“I need to have my needs met”* or *“My children must be happy.”* Thus many leave a biblical church and compromise truth for happiness. However, the sanctuary of the tabernacle is called *“holy places.”* Holiness means to be separate from what God calls wrong and consecrated to what He calls good and right. Psalm 93:5 reveals: *“Holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever.”* The assembly is told in 1 Corinthians 3:17: *“If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.”*

For one to be an active part of

God's church, what are the requirements? The same as heaven—cleansing. Remember the altar (cleansing by blood) and the laver (cleansing by water) had to be approached before the priests could enter into the sanctuary and accomplish the service of God.

The church of God at Corinth (His temple) had this background: "many of the Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). They were washed by the blood of Christ from their sins and made presentable through the gospel (sanctified and justified); which they demonstrated by water baptism. At this point they were not only fit for heaven but for full fellowship in His earthly sanctuary, the church.

To add further requirements that must be met for initial reception into church fellowship, apart from cleansing by water and by blood, is not to walk uprightly "according to the truth of the gospel" (Gal. 2:14).

Old Testament Tabernacle Picture

The priests not only were sprinkled with blood, but completely washed in water before they initiated their activity in the sanctuary of God (Ex. 29). However, after their initial bath there was to be a daily washing at the laver of just their hands and feet as they continued their service unto God. As Exodus 30:19-20 says, "For Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and feet thereat: When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation." Thus continued activity in the presence of God required cleansing off the dirt picked up in the course of living. Notice they did not need a whole bath again, just the hands and feet.

One was not to function in the holy place in an unclean state.

The Porters (Gatekeepers)

There was a duty associated with the tabernacle we don't hear much about. There was the responsibility of the porter or gatekeeper. We read of their office in 1 Chronicles chapter 9 verses 21 and 23: "And Zechariah the son of Meshelemiah was porter of the door of the tabernacle of the congregation...So they and their children had the oversight of the gates of the

If we do not stop at the laver and wash in the water of the Word and apply it to our lives in overcoming sin then we will find ourselves not in fellowship with God and under His chastening hand.

house of the LORD." In 2 Chronicles 23:19 we learn the exact function of the overseers of the gates: "And he set the porters at the gates of the house of the LORD, that none which was unclean in any thing should enter in."

Polluting God's sanctuary was a serious offense which brought judgment (Ezek. 44:7; Jer. 7:29-30).

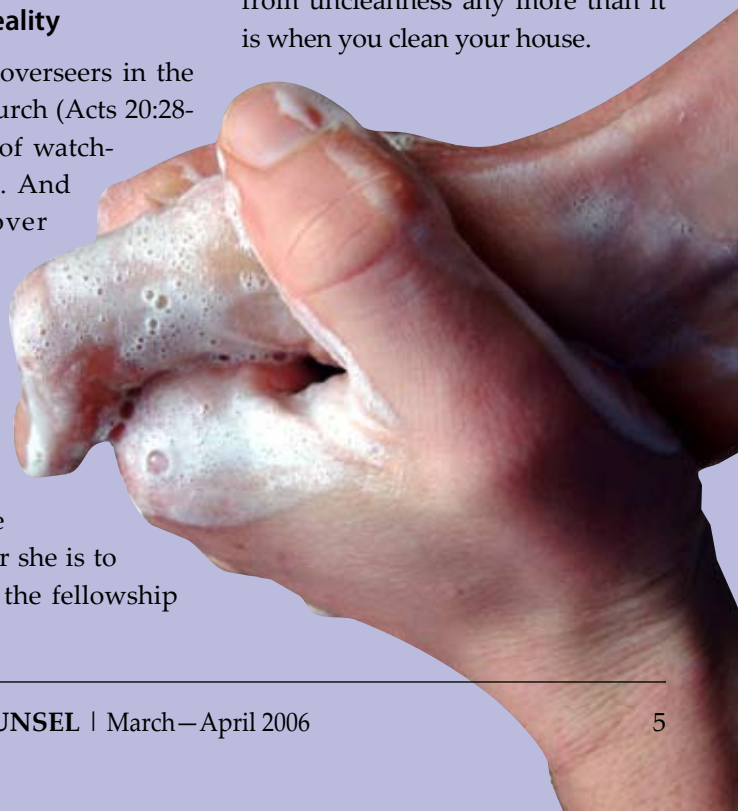
New Testament Reality

We also read of overseers in the New Testament church (Acts 20:28-32) in the context of watching over the flock. And we further discover that the church is to deal with uncleanness in it. 1 Corinthians chapter 5 teaches that when a believer is involved in certain sins of the flesh or spirit, he or she is to be put away from the fellowship

of the church and "with such an one no not to eat." (2 Cor. 2 teaches that there is a time for receiving back in love.) The reason given is that sin is like yeast or leaven; it spreads among others if not removed. Thus the church was told to "purge [to cleanse] out therefore the old leaven" and not keep the feast with "the leaven of malice and wickedness" (1 Cor. 5:7-8).

Paul claimed that if the church at Corinth did not repent of their uncleanness he would be taking stronger measures with them when he came (2 Cor. 12:21).

Where are the gatekeepers today who do not view the church just as a social club or a "happy hour" but as God's holy temple and home? It is not legalism to guard God's house from uncleanness any more than it is when you clean your house.



The Believer's Body

"What? Know ye not that your body is the temple [Gk. "nao" holy sanctuary] of the Holy Ghost which is in you" (1 Cor. 6:19).

Here we learn the truth that we are not only holy when we get to heaven or are "in the church," but seven days a week and 24 hours

Old Testament Tabernacle Picture

On a personal level the priests had to keep themselves clean. In Leviticus 22:3, 6 we read, *"Whosoever he be of all your seed among your generations, that goeth unto the holy things... having his uncleanness upon him, that soul shall be cut off from my presence: I am the LORD...The soul which hath*

from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Psalms 119:9 asks and answers the question: *"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy Word."*

It is not a matter of being saved again but cleansed in our daily life. The priests did not have to bathe completely again at the door of the tabernacle but did have to stop at the laver for the daily cleansing of their hands and feet. The Lord told Peter that he that is washed is *"clean every whit"* and need not to wash again except his feet (John 13:10).

There are times we fail and our sin grieves the Holy Spirit and mars our fellowship with the Father. Yet when we apply the solution of His Word (the water) and confess our sins, we are promised that *"He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* because in this light we walk and *"the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin"* (1 Jn. 1:7-9).

Whether it is heaven itself or the church fellowship or personal fellowship with God, all are His holy dwelling places. Thus we can enter the holiest boldly *"by the blood of Jesus"* and *"draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water"* (Heb. 10:19-22).

Randall Amos

Rochester, New York

Whether it is heaven itself or the church fellowship or personal fellowship with God, all are His holy dwelling places.

a day; for we are the holy place of God wherever we go. God's temple (the believer's body) is portable just like the tabernacle tent was. We know that on a personal level God's Holy Spirit will only live in a person's heart that has been purified (cleaned). *"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 [made clean] their hearts by faith"* (Acts 15:8-9).

touched any such thing shall be unclean until the even, and shall not eat of the holy thing, unless he wash his flesh with water."

New Testament Reality

Yes, though having experienced the one time *"washing of regeneration,"* we do pick up the defilement of the world in our daily life. If we do not stop at the laver and wash in the water of the Word and apply it to our lives in over-

coming sin then we will find ourselves not in fellowship with God and under His chastening hand so we can again become partakers of His holiness (Heb. 12).

We see in 2 Corinthians 6:14 and 7:1 that we have the personal responsibility of not touching the unclean thing and to *"cleanse ourselves*



The Priesthood of New Testament Believers

Introduction

Early on the morning of July 6, 1415 in the city of Constance, Germany the atmosphere was electrifying. People were gathering together because an execution was to take place that day. The people wanted to see the man who would be brought from his prison to a cathedral.

When the procession began, the man who came first was carrying a gilded cross. After him came a bishop dressed in his gorgeous robes. He was followed by a group of soldiers who were armed with swords and lances. In the middle of the soldiers was a defenseless man. He was 46 years of age.

The people watched the man walking resolutely toward the cathedral. He was taken through the large doors and up on a platform. The man dropped to his knees and clasped his hands in front of him.

He was charged with several heresies and he was branded a heretic. A mock crown of paper with pictures of devils was put on his head. On it were written the words "This is a heretic." Despite his humiliation this brave man remained calm and composed.

He was taken outside the cathedral into the street where a large stake had been imbedded in the ground. The man smiled as he approached the fire. Someone was heard remarking, "He goes as if he is on his way to a banquet."

His executioner bound him to the stake and placed wood around his

feet. "Burn him" someone shouted as the wood was lit. The flames soon enveloped his body. Out of the flames some of the people heard him say, "Thou that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy on me." His head fell to his chest as the fire consumed his body. Incredibly, all of his body was not completely burned so the remaining part was burned again until nothing but ashes were left. The executioner gathered up the ashes and threw them into the nearby river. The current of the water took them away.

Who was this man? Why was he branded a heretic? Why was he executed in such a horrible way? This brave and courageous believer was

There is no special priesthood now for the church because all believers are priests!

John Huss. He was a reformer before the Reformation began as a result of the actions of Martin Luther. What was his crime? He believed and taught the priesthood of all believers. Against the background of his time he taught the biblical doctrine that every believer is a priest and not a select group of men. He saw clearly that salvation was not mediated to individuals through priests. This important truth of the priesthood of all believers has not been a minor point in the annals of Church history.

Often we have a limited view of the scope of believer/priesthood.

The New Testament Priesthood is not limited to certain ministries but is a lifestyle that embraces the whole of the Christian life.

1 New Testament Priesthood is different from the Old Testament Priesthood. God appointed priests from the tribe of Levi (Ex. 4:14). In fact, the whole tribe of Levi was dedicated to taking care of the practical matters of the tabernacle (Lev. 3:5-51). Moses was instructed by the LORD to take Aaron and his sons from among the people of Israel to serve Him as priests (Ex. 28:1). Aaron would serve as the High Priest and his sons as priests. The high priest was appointed by God

for men. He was to offer gifts and sacrifices both for himself and for the people (Heb. 5:1). Aaron and his sons were a distinct and separate class of men. They wore distinctive clothing (Ex. 28:3). They represented the people to God. They were the only ones who could offer sacrifices. Only the priests could enter the tabernacle, and later the temple, to offer incense and perform other duties. Only the high priest was allowed to go into the inner part of the tabernacle and he only did this once a year (Lev. 16:1-34; Heb. 9:7). This was God's ordained method for the Israelites. The priesthood

was part of an arrangement called the Mosaic Law.

When the Lord Jesus died on the cross this system came to an end (Matt. 27:51; Rom. 10:4). It was done away with. Now there is one great High Priest, the Lord Jesus (Heb. 2:17; 4:14-16; 5:5-6; 7:20-27; 8:1-6; 9:11-14; 10:19-22). Because of the cross all believers are priests (1 Pet.

It is important to realize that priestly service is not limited to local assembly meetings.

2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6). There is no special priesthood now for the Church because all believers are priests! The Lord Jesus is the Great High Priest and we are a kingdom of priests! "When a person puts his or her confidence in the Lord Jesus for forgiveness of sin and eternal life, he or she becomes a priest at that very moment. Under the Mosaic Law, the priesthood was limited to the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron. And even those who were priests were forbidden to approach the Presence of God. Only the high priest could do that on one day of the year (Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement) following the precisely ordained procedure outlined for the event by the Lord. In the new dispensation, all believers are priests with instant access to the Throne Room of the universe, day or night" (*Believer's Bible Commentary*, 1989 printing, William MacDonald, page 1074).

A system of making certain men clergyman and the rest of the believers laity is not based on New Testament revelation. This practice is based on the Old Testament. There are still those who think of themselves as priests and function as a separate class. They wear distinctive

clothing and believe that salvation must be mediated through them. This is a very serious violation of the Scriptures. It puts one's salvation in the hands of man and not of God. It has the devastating effect of separating the soul from direct contact with God. It replaces the work of the Holy Spirit whose purpose is to individually convict men and women of their

sin and of the value of the death of Christ. It prevents men and women from coming directly to God for salvation. "To try to perpetuate such a 'priesthood' distinct from the rest of believers is to attempt to maintain an Old Testament institution which Christ has abolished once for all" (*1 Peter*, Wayne Grudem, page 101.)

2 Description of New Testaments

Priests. Peter describes believer-priests as "holy" and "royal" (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). "Holy" refers to the character of believer-priests. Holiness of life is to characterize the believer. "Royal" refers to the dignity of being able to show forth the praises (wonderful works) of the Lord. It is the word for "king." Both the dignified privilege and the responsibility of holiness are characteristics of our priesthood. We, as priests, have direct access to God (Heb. 4:16). Each of us has the privilege of direct communication with the Lord. There is only one Mediator now between God and man. That Person is the Lord Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5). This is true both for the individual believer and the local assembly.

3 Functions of our Priesthood.

The function of a New Testament priest is to "offer up spiritual

sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5). The priests of the Old Testament offered physical animals (Lev. 1-5) but our sacrifices are spiritual in nature. When Peter says that our sacrifices are acceptable through Jesus Christ, he means that they are offered in the motivation and strength of the Lord Jesus. When we love Him and depend on His strength, our sacrifices become acceptable.

What are the functions of the New Testament priest? It is important to realize that priestly service is not limited to local assembly meetings. "It is certainly not limited to the beginning and ending of church gatherings, such as meetings for worship, Bible reading, or prayer, but includes the whole man, not only in but also outside the meeting-rooms, halls, chapels and church buildings. In this full sense of the word the whole New Testament people of God is 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'" (*In the Arena of Faith*, Eric Sauer, page 134).

In other words, the functions of the believer-priest encompasses his lifestyle. The New Testament points us to a seven-fold function.

1. Sacrifice of Ourselves (Rom. 12:1-3)
 2. Sacrifice of Our Praise (Heb. 13:15)
 3. Sacrifice of Giving (Heb. 13:16; Phil. 4:18)
 4. Sympathy to Others (Rom. 12:15; cf Heb. 4:15)
 5. Sharing the Gospel (Rom. 15:16)
 6. Showing Forth God's Excellencies (1 Pet. 2:9)
 7. Supplication in Prayer (Rom. 12:12; 1 Thess. 5:17)
- (to be continued in next issue)**

Charles Fizer
Asbury, IA



Letter to Ephesus

It is rather appropriate that the first letter in this series of seven in Revelation is addressed to the church in Ephesus. Ephesus was unquestionably the “first” city in Asia Minor and while not the capital it was looked on as first in culture, finance, shipping and general trade. This thought is pursued in the letter which speaks of “first love” and “first works.” One of their main problems was a failure to keep the Lord in the first place in their hearts. The church here had been established for many years and, born in adversity, it was strong in faith. Some people from Ephesus may have been in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost and, believing, would have taken the good news back home to share with their townsfolk. Ephesus was a beautiful and remarkable city. It lay on the Cayster river and though some miles inland it boasted a fine harbor. The architecture was stunning and, very much left alone by Rome, the city was able to pursue its own cultural interests. They had a magnificent library and it was the first to rival the hitherto unassailable Alexandria for the sheer number of scrolls in the library’s possession. The population of around 400,000 consisted of Jews, Greeks, Romans and Phrygians. It was famous for banking and trade, and most of all for the Temple of Diana. Remarkable too were the city’s theatre (the

largest in the Greek world with a 50,000 seating capacity), amphitheatre, baths and brothels. Many of these remains can still be seen today in the ancient ruins of the city.

It was in this very city that Priscilla and Aquila settled down to work while taking the opportunities that arose to preach and teach. Paul visited on perhaps three occasions and once stayed for three years and for the last two of those taught each day in the School of Tyrannus, said to be located beside the library. Other well-known brethren associated with Ephesus were Apollos, Timothy and John. When Paul was passing by on one occasion and had not time to visit, he sent for the elders and they travelled to Miletus where he spoke passionately to them about the future

Introduction, v. 1

This letter, like the other six, is addressed to “the angel of the church” and, as we noted in the introductory article in the last issue of this magazine, the angel is probably representative of the responsible brethren; i.e., those involved in leadership, pastoring and teaching. Some commentators believe that the angel is really a heavenly being as in all the other mentions in the book, while others teach that the angel is representative of the spiritual atmosphere or “the spirit” of the assembly. This letter, unlike the one commonly known as the “Epistle to the Ephesians” which is believed to be a circular letter, is peculiarly theirs though other churches of the time had access to it even

It is reassuring to know that the Lord is in control of the assembly as it's Head and that He specially holds very close to Himself those most vulnerable to attack.

and its very real dangers. The letter we are now considering was probably written forty years after that event. We shall look at it under the following headings: 1) Introduction, v. 1; 2) Commendations, vv. 2-3; 3) Condemnations, vv. 4-6; 4) Instruction, v. 7a; 5) Conclusion, vv. 7b-8.

as we do today. The Lord describes Himself as the One “that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand” and as “he who walketh in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.” The seven stars are the seven angels of the seven churches. Stars in the Bible have to do with a demonstration of



creatorial glory and of course may be used for navigation, even guidance. In a world where Satan

is present and where sin proliferates it is reassuring to know that the Lord is in control of the assembly as its Head and that He specially holds very close to Himself those most vulnerable to attack—the leaders—those with responsibility to guide. They are in His right hand indicating that He holds them with authority and power. His walking in the midst is suggestive of priestly activity on behalf of the assembly. His constant activity is to encourage the lamp of testimony to burn brightly which He achieves through close and constant observation and as did the priests of old by trimming the lamps.

Commendations, vv. 2-3

These verses contain unreserved commendations of the works of the Ephesus assembly. The Lord says that He “fully knows” all the details of their testimony and service. He commends their works, their labor and their patience. In 1 Thessalonians, while commending similar things in that church, Paul adds “of faith,” “of love,” and “of hope.” There he could see the motivation of the Thessalonian Christians but here the Lord speaks only of the outward and not of the inward driving force. With the motivation missing we may assume that at Ephesus there was outward form but it was not driven by spirituality and enthusiasm. Works, labour and patience are all good in themselves but if not carried out for the right reasons then they are useless and unfruitful. In doctrine, too, the assembly was to be com-

mended. Rightly, they would not tolerate any deviation from the revealed Word nor allow leaven to spread through the company. Structure and activity were beyond criticism. Indeed, those who came to the assembly were tested as to how they stood relative to the truth and the genuineness of their position was judged...and they always got it right! Invariably the false was detected and rejected. Here was, apparently, an assembly where everything was just as it should be. The Lord acknowledges that and commends them for it. We should imitate these good things. But, alas, there is more...

Condemnations, vv. 4-6

In spite of the fulsome praise and the divine recognition of the assembly work the leaders now face censure of a most severe nature. The Lord says, “I have...against thee.” The “somewhat” of the AV tends to minimize the condemnation. “Somewhat” should not be there, its omission emphasizes the seriousness of the remaining words. The assembly stands accused of having left (not lost) their first love. If we lose something we do not know where it is. If we leave something we do know where we left it. Interestingly, something left is easier to go back to than to something lost. Luke chapter 15 illustrates the difference: the sheep was lost but the elder son had left. First love has nothing to do with time but everything to do with quality. It is love that has priority over everything. It is best love, the love of espousals. Those within the assembly may believe that all is well and those without might judge similarly. Right doctrine, orthodoxy, service were all ticked boxes, but the Lord sees

more! He judges that love for Himself has been abandoned. They had “left” Him. A deliberate choice had been made and in their hearts they held doctrine, orthodoxy and service higher than love for the Lord, and that will never do. The result of leaving love for the Lord is a falling away in power compared with better days. The believers are therefore

**Let us encourage
one another by
a passionate
personal devotion
to the Lord.**

exhorted to “remember,” to “repent” and to “do the first works.” The Lord spells it out for them in easy steps. Should they fail to do so, then serious problems await. The threat is that the Lord will quickly remove the lampstand. That gathering of saints may still meet but there would be no possibility of recovery. If they accept leaving Him as how they are characterized then He will leave them. This is indeed a matter for serious concern.

Nevertheless, the assembly is commended for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans. The Lord also hated the deeds of this strange sect. Love was weak but the assembly could still rustle up a good amount of hatred! Who were these Nicolaitans? My answer is simple—I do not know! They are mentioned again in the letter to the church in Pergamos. Clearly, they are not the same as those who held the doctrine of Balaam (see 2:14-15). Some teach that they were followers of Nicho-

las of Antioch, but there is no biblical support for that. Others suggest that if the word is divided into two parts it means “power over the people,” equating to the start of the system of clerisy. That seems to be clutching at straws, and making the Bible fit in with our (Scriptural) beliefs. The system of clerisy is wrong; it is “power over the people” but it is not taught here. I do not know who these Nicolatians were (neither does anyone else) but they may be a group that through individuals claiming to be apostles sought to infiltrate the church. They had not succeeded at Ephesus though they had at Pergamos, at least to some extent. They sought acceptance, adulation and self-gratification. They were dividers of the Lord’s people. What we can say here, and with confidence, is that we should learn to hate the things the Lord hates, among which are: pride; self-will; deceit and an overbearing attitude, and so guard the testimony. Away with Diotrophes and his emulators, of whom the phrase “power over the people” would be an apt description.

Instructions, v. 7a

The appeal is now made to the church that if a person has an ear he should hear! Change usually begins with the exercise of one individual. As a result many more can be won to the cause by example and encouragement. This is especially true of love and devotion. While it seems the assembly as a whole had left their first love there was a way back but it had to start somewhere and with someone. When we hear a brother worshipping it should be clear that he loves the Lord and we can catch the spirit of love and worship and join in the appreciation of the Lord as to who He is and

what He has done. I doubt whether the instruction to hear was taken on board at Ephesus but today we should accept the warning, hear and do something in our own personal lives to return to first love. Let us encourage one another by a passionate personal devotion to the Lord.

Conclusions, v. 7b

Here we are introduced to the overcomers. Who are they? In a special way every believer is an overcomer. In another way the overcomer may be those individuals who hear and heed the message and return through personal devotion to first love. A wonderful promise is made to them that the Lord will give them to eat of the

tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God. This is language reminiscent of the early chapters of Genesis: a placing in a garden paradise; walking; a fall; an exclusion from the garden; return hindered by angelic beings. What was lost to all in Eden was restored by One at Calvary. The tree of life speaks of sustenance and Paradise of a return to the beginning of things. So, too, those individuals who respond to the exhortation will be sustained by the Lord and will once again enjoy the fruits of first love. May we pray to be included among those who hear.

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The Riches of His Grace

Rahab the harlot, as the Bible usually calls her, was the first Gentile to join the Lord's people. She was saved by believing on the true and only God of the Hebrews. Someone said "If Abraham believed God when there were not a people; Rahab identified herself with this people when they had nothing but God."

As many of us already know, names in the Old Testament usually do have meaning and significance. I believe that we can glean precious truths by meditating on what is the meaning of some of the names in the story of Rahab.

The grace of God toward Rahab extended way beyond her need of salvation.

"Rahab" means "breadth" and in it we can see "for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction" (Matt. 7:13) which describes the kind of life that Rahab was living before she was saved (compare Eph. 2:8-16). After joining the Lord's people Rahab got married to a man called Salmon. His name means "covering, raiment, cloth or garment". In him we see a beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus who "has clothed me with the garments of salvation; He has covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Isa. 61:10). Rahab who once was spiritually naked because of her sins, like every one of us before being saved, has found covering and was clothed in Salmon who is a picture of our Saviour.

Boaz is the son of Rahab and Salmon. His name means "in him is strength." We see in him a picture

of our Lord Jesus Christ who gives us strength to walk in the newness of life. Also, in Exodus 15:2 we read, "The Lord is my strength and song and He is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will praise Him."

Obed is the son of Boaz and his name means "serving," which is considered a natural result after obtaining salvation from our sins and experiencing the strength in the Lord. It is the desire of our heart to serve the one who has loved us and washed us from our sins. "And how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God: and wait for

his son from heaven" (1 Thess. 1:9-10). We can tell that Rahab had served the Lord through preaching to her family. How encouraging that her father's household, and all that she had were spared the judgment and destruction of Jericho. It was a clear evidence of the fruit of her faith (Josh. 6:25).

Later we read about Jesse, the son of Boaz. His name means "of him who is my subsistence" or the one who provides. In our Christian walk we rely on our beloved Saviour for our spiritual existence and growth. He makes provision for us in order to mature, He takes care of our needs and He is our advocate. He is the one who intercedes for us. Paul once said, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves but our sufficiency is of God" (2 Cor. 3:5).

Finally, we come to David, the

son of Jesse and his name means "beloved" which takes our mind to Ephesians 1:6, "To the praise of the glory of His grace wherein He has made us accepted in the beloved." It is very important to realize that all the blessings and riches that we have now is in the beloved.

We see Rahab, who once was Gentile, has been brought in to be one of God's people. She was without Christ, being alien from the common wealth of Israel but through her faith in the God of Israel she was no more a stranger and foreigner, but fellow citizen with the saints, and of the household of God. She enjoyed the cloth of salvation, the robe of righteousness, and experienced the strength and the might of the Lord; she had the privilege to serve the true and only God and to enjoy all the blessings of the Promised Land.

The grace of God toward Rahab extended way beyond her need of salvation and the salvation of her father's house and even beyond all the blessings that she enjoyed by living among God's chosen people and sharing the fruit of the land. First, she was privileged to be in the genealogy of our beloved Saviour (Matt. 1:5). How great the riches of His grace and how rich is the glory of that grace! Second, she joined the great cloud of witnesses in Hebrews chapter 11, verse 31 not because of any good work that she did, but because of her work of faith by receiving the spies with peace. Third, one day we are going to see her when we reach our eternal dwelling with the Lord

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THE LORD JESUS CHRIST: VILIFIED AND VINDICATED

Lately there has been much in the news about the “true identity” of Christ. *The Da Vinci Code*, like its predecessors *Holy Blood*, *Holy Grail*, and *The Last Temptation of Christ*, affirms that the Lord Jesus was a mere man, who did ordinary things such as starting a family. Since this novel has been such a lucrative commercial success, spawning a major motion picture, other volumes have followed, purporting to reveal the secrets of the “real Jesus” (e.g. *The Jesus Papers*; *The Jesus Dynasty*, etc.). The suggestions that these works make are certainly not new. They are merely popularizing ideas that infidel scholarship has propounded for the last two centuries (from the nineteenth century liberal German scholar David Strauss’ “biography” *The Life of Jesus* to *The Jesus Seminar* of the 1980’s & 1990’s to the more recent *The Pagan Christ* by the University of Toronto’s Tom Harpur). In fact, attacks on the person of the Lord Jesus are actually quite ancient. The apostles dealt with such falsehoods in their writings (2 Tim. 3:13; 1 Jn. 2:18-19). Note Paul’s impassioned warning to the elders from Ephesus: *“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. 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” (Acts 20:28-30). In spite of the ever-multiplying attacks on Him, the biblical Christ will stand up to close historical scrutiny. The most compelling and realistic Jesus is the One that we encounter in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The Historical War Against the Claims of Christ

The apostolic church was confronted by a number of cults including the Docetists, who believed that Christ only seemed to take on human nature or possess a body. Other heretical teachers like Cerinthus taught that Jesus was distinct from the Christ-spirit, who came upon Him at His baptism. Colossians teaches the central place of the Lord Jesus in spiritual things against those who would seek meaning and improvement outside of Him (Col. 1:12-23). Additionally, the Spirit used John to write the Gospel and his Epistles to counter these lies regarding the identity of the Christ (e.g. 1 John 4:1-3).

In spite of the ever-multiplying attacks on Him, the biblical Christ will stand up to close historical scrutiny.

Among other ancient attacks on Christ, the Jewish Talmud accuses Jesus of being a sorcerer and asserts that He was executed as a blasphemer. Interestingly, it also claims that His followers wanted to steal His body and that it was re-interred by a gardener named Judah; thereby, confirming that this was the ancient story fabricated by the Jews to account for the empty

tomb (see Matt. 28:11-15).¹ Rather than contradict the Gospel accounts these unfriendly references actually fit in with what the New Testament claims about Him. There are other extra-biblical mentions of Christ and Christians by the ancient Jewish historian Josephus, the Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius,

He first spoke them, His words still speak to the deepest needs of mankind. The alternative Jesus of the false gospels is insipid, capricious, vaguely new age-ish, and generally smacks of literary invention; this imposter is wispy and two dimensional. The real Christ was holy, yet humane; mighty, yet merciful; lov-

and the greatest of them are written with hate: that of Reimarus, the Wolfenbiittel Fragmentist, and that of David Friedrich Strauss. It was not so much hate of the Person of Jesus as of the supernatural nimbus with which it was so easy to surround Him, and with which He had in fact been surrounded. They

All of the alternative liberal theories concerning the empty tomb require more faith than believing what the Bible actually says.

as well as in the correspondence of Pliny the Younger to the Emperor Trajan, the writings of the Greek satirist Lucian, and a letter by the Syrian Mara bar-Serapion. To put it mildly there is much ancient literary and archaeological evidence to support the biblical account of Jesus and His disciples.²

Unlike spurious gospels like The Gospel of Thomas, The Gospel of Mary, and the recently discovered Gospel of Judas, the traditional gospels bear the marks of genuine historiography. That is to say, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are filled with verifiable details like geographical places, people, and historical events (e.g. the census surrounding Jesus' birth, Luke 2:1-4). The other Gospel claimants betray fanciful and Gnostic biases. Furthermore, they are of inferior literary caliber, and do not match the harmonious presentation of the biblical Christ in the Bible. This Book alone presents a coherent portrait of Christ. What is more, He is entirely believable. Millennia after

ing, but not licentious. His miracles always bolstered His teaching (unlike the preposterous miracles of the Gnostic writings—they aim more at sensationalism). In fact, the modern rejection of the traditional Jesus has more to do with contemporary opinions, than with bona fide scholarship.

History or Propaganda?

Present-day thinkers seek to strip the biblical Christ of all glory and power. They desire a tolerant Messiah, a feminist guru, or a feel-good self-help sage who will inflate people's self-esteem. Even Albert Schweitzer—himself no friend to evangelical theology—favourably noted that the modern biographers of Christ tended to construct their portraits of Christ based on their own presuppositions, saying: "each individual created Him in accordance with his own character. There is no historical task which so reveals a man's true self as the writing of a Life of Jesus. Hate as well as love can write a Life of Jesus,

were eager to picture Him as truly and purely human, to strip from Him the robes of splendour with which He had been appalled, and clothe Him once more with the coarse garments in which He had walked in Galilee."³ The scholars that he was reviewing, consciously set out to "de-mystify" Christ, because of their anti-supernatural prejudices. Hence, they rejected the traditional understanding of the Gospels because they contained accounts of the supernatural.

The liberal attacks notwithstanding, if the canonical gospels invented the orthodox Jesus they pulled off an unheralded feat in the history of literature. To create a fictional character who resonates with human aspirations—One who permeates all of Western civilization—One who millions not only revere, but claim to have encountered personally, would require the genius of Homer, Shakespeare, and Tolstoy all rolled into one. For four Gospels to speak of Christ from four different viewpoints, yet pro-

duce a balanced man who changes lives, is indeed miraculous.

Jesus was not invented, for His resurrection gives clear evidence as to His true identity. As Romans 1:4 puts it: “[He was] *declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.*”

The doctrine of the resurrection is unique in the annals of metaphysical writings. The Gospel accounts of this authenticating sign are replete with historically verifiable information. There are diverse eyewitnesses including women, the twelve apostles, five hundred believers seeing Him simultaneously, and formerly skeptical individuals like James the half-brother of Jesus and Saul of Tarsus (1 Cor. 15:1-9). If this account were a fabrication, the forgers would hardly make women the first eyewitnesses (in the Jewish world, their testimony was considered dubious; it took the testimony of two women to equal that of one man in court). What is more, all of the alternative liberal theories concerning the empty tomb require more faith than believing what the Bible actually says. To think that Christ could survive the horrors of the cross without His professional executioners noticing strains credulity. How could such a weakened figure roll away the stone? If the body was stolen, then surely the guards would have been executed, but they went on living (with extra money in their pockets). The idea that the women and Peter and John all went to the wrong tomb on multiple occasions is farfetched. Furthermore, no medical evidence explains the phenomenon of so many people seeing, touching, and communing with the risen Lord. The only believable explanation is

Let the unbelievers assault Him; at His coming He will be vindicated.

that He actually rose again from the dead.

Millions of contemporary Christians know the historical Jesus experientially. They have discovered that He is true to His word: “*If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him*” (John 14:23). Let the unbelievers assault Him; at His coming He will be vindicated (Phil. 2:9-11; 2 Thess. 1:7-8; Rev. 1:7).

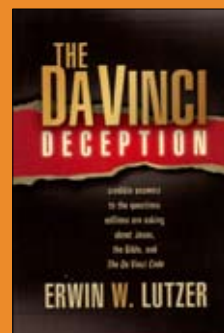
1. These quotations may be found in the tractates Sanhedrin 43a & Toledoth Jesu.

2. For more information on these extra biblical references to Christ, see Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*, Joplin, MO: College Press Publ. Co., 1996.

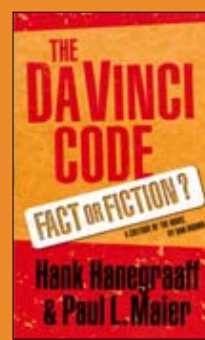
3. Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, electronic edition, www.earlychristianwritings.com/schweitzer, p. 4, 1910.

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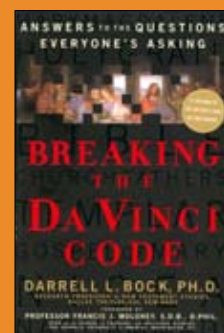
For further study on *The Da Vinci Code*, the author recommends:



The Da Vinci Deception
by Erwin W. Lutzer,
Tyndale House Publ., 2004;



The Da Vinci Code: Fact or Fiction?
By Hank Hanegraaff
& Paul L. Maier,
Tyndale House Publ., 2004;



For a good review of the Gnostic writings see: *Breaking the Da Vinci Code: Answers to the Questions Everyone's Asking* by Darrell L. Bock, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004.

The Head Covering

Heathenism almost always has debased the woman; the gospel has always liberated her and entrusted to her a God-given ministry.

It has been one of the distinctive characteristics of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ that wherever it has been preached, it has elevated womanhood from the degradation of heathenism to a place of nobility beside the man. Heathenism almost always has debased the woman; the gospel has always liberated her and entrusted to her a God-given ministry, uniquely fitted to her capacity and characteristics.

Of course, every flourishing fashion or movement in the world tends to overspill in the Church. The evidence of this may be seen in the styles and patterns of behaviour that are becoming more common among believers. One of the most general of these is the increasing number of women who appear at assembly meetings without a head covering.

TRADITION OR TRUTH?

A small group of believers was discussing this one day and an elder happened to join them. When he heard their conversation had to do with the head covering, he dismissed the matter with the remark, "It is inconsequential." One can hardly blame many of these women who go without a head covering into an assembly of believers when they have not been taught by their spiritual leaders what is spiritually correct. The question thus arises: is it inconsequential or is it indeed a Scriptural tenet, a tradition or a truth? Putting aside personal preferences for a few moments, let us try to find from Scripture what is taught on the subject, specifically from 1 Corinthians 11. It will be a help to the interested reader to have the Bible open for reference.

THREE SYMBOLS

There are three symbols in this chapter. There is the head, the bread, and the wine. Can we take the liberty of saying that one of these symbols is "inconsequential"? If so, which one? Can we omit the bread next Lord's Day at the Lord's supper, or the wine? Such a flagrant departure would not be tolerated in any company of the Lord's people. Then by what principle of interpretation can the other symbol be relegated to the growing

list of "inconsequential" we hear about these days?

A cursory reading of 1 Corinthians 11 readily shows that there are two distinct lessons in the first section of this chapter which deal with the head. First, is a lesson in headship; second, a lesson in glory.

HEADSHIP

Verse 3 sets the foundation for the lesson in headship. It teaches the divine order of authority. It is significant that even here the Spirit of God does not put the woman first, although that would be the logical order in the ascending scale of authority in the spiritual realm. Rather, it is written: "*The head of every man is Christ: and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.*" In Ephesians the headship of Christ is related corporally to the whole body of the Church. In 1 Corinthians His headship is related individually to the believer. In verse 4 the covered head of the praying or prophesying man is seen to be dishonouring to his head ("*and the head of every man is Christ*"). Here the simple words "*to cover*" are used. Thus Christ must not be dishonoured by His symbolic concealment, the covered head of the man.

The woman is warned in verse

five. The uncovered head dishonours her figurative head (*"and the head of the woman is the man"*). The reason the man is not held in dishonour will be developed in the lesson in glory: *"Forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God"* (v. 7). The word *"dishonour"* is a superlative, *"to thoroughly put to shame."* In the context of the chapter when a man appears with his head covered, or a woman with her head uncovered, it is an implicit denial for the divine teaching regarding headship, whether intentional or otherwise.

GLORY

Now the Spirit leads Paul to press the issue and to show its solemn overtones by giving a lesson in glory, and strong reasons for compliance with this word of instruction. Glory might be said to be a visible manifestation of inward nature. The glory of a rose bush is the rose. That is not all of the rose bush, but the bloom is the manifestation of its nature. By the rose, we learn the nature of the bush. The reason for the uncovered head of the man is given, as previously mentioned, in verse seven, *"Forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God."* Image is not likeness; these are distinctly different ideas. Likeness is similitude, being like; image is representation, whether like or not. The Lord Jesus is never spoken of as being in the *"likeness of God."* He cannot be *"like"* God, He IS God.

Man must not, then, cover his head in exercise of the spiritual functions referred to, forasmuch as he represents God as His image. Further, he is the glory of God. If image is representation, then glory is manifestation. God's authority must be unchallenged and His glory must not be hid. This is the twofold reason for the uncovered head of the man.

The woman is not spoken of as

the image of man, but as his glory. Here it is not representation but manifestation. The glory of man must not be manifest in spiritual exercises, therefore that glory must be covered. No glory but God's is to be seen in the spiritual realm.

THE SCHOOL OF ANGELS

The reason for the woman's covering is also twofold: first it is a natural one. Verse 8 shows that the man had precedence in the natural realm and is therefore an image of God, *"for Adam was first formed"* (1 Tim. 2:13). Second, a spiritual reason is given in verse ten. *"For this cause ought a woman to have power (a sign of submission to authority) on her head because of the angels."* Note, it is not because of her husband or other men in the company, but rather,

The glory of man must not be manifest in spiritual exercises...No glory but God's is to be seen in the spiritual realm.

"because of the angels." Why is this? Ephesians 3:10 gives a clue as to the importance of angelic observation. God uses the Church to teach them something of His manifold wisdom. How can these spirit creatures learn the biblical significance of the Lordship of Christ, the place of the Church, and the individual believer? Such things are an utter mystery to them. God shows them by object lessons or symbols.

Just as Aaron is a type of Christ in certain ways though completely unaware of it himself, and just as the Lord used a little child to teach the disciples a lesson on entrance into the kingdom, although the child was oblivious to his role, so now, though we may be unaware of it at any mo-

ment, we are under the scrutiny of spirit beings. We are being used by God as object lessons to make known the glorious truths of authority and submission which otherwise would be unintelligible to them. How solemn! Yet Abraham grasped a higher truth when he said, *"The Lord before whom I walk"* (Gen. 24:40).

When a woman comes into a gathering for spiritual exercise with her head covered, she becomes to the angels an object lesson of submission to divine headship. What a rebuke she is to the wicked angels! Their sin is that of rebelling against divine authority. What a delight to the obedient angels. As they see also the man's head uncovered portraying the unshielded glory of God and His accepted authority!

However, there is an assurance

in verse 11 that positionally, *"in the Lord,"* there is no thought of priority because of sex.

THE DOUBLE COVER-UP

Some excuse their uncovered heads by citing verse 15, *"Her hair is given her for a covering."* If she has hair that is enough, these assert. Surely, just the careful reading of the text would show such an interpretation to be a weak avoidance of the truth as it is set out. Notice that for the woman there are two glories involved. She is a glory: *"The woman is the glory of the man"* (v. 7). But she also has a glory of her own. Her hair is a glory to HER (v. 15). For the glory that she is (the glory of the man), God has given her a

natural covering, her long hair. For the glory that she has (her hair), she must submit her will to cover that with another covering which she

if those who so argue really desire after conformity to Christ it is clearly taught in Scripture that for the present it is moral likeness to

problem and applied only to that church. However, all the teaching of this epistle is clearly directed in its introduction. It was written to the Corinthians saints *“with all that in every place call upon the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord”* (1 Cor. 1:2).

The Spirit indeed is at work in all our lives seeking to transform us in heart and conduct to the Lord Himself.

places over her own glory.

For all who can receive the ministry of the Word directly from its pages or from others, there is a responsibility to obey. Elders and ministers of God’s Word are also accountable to give needed instruction and not to shun to declare the whole counsel of God. If we fail to address ourselves to these matters we should not be surprised when aberrations appear regularly, even brazenly among us.

LONG-HAIRED MEN

Long-haired men are not left out of these solemn verses (1 Cor. 11:1-16). In this day when even some believers seem to follow this fashion, a word might be timely though not always welcome. Verse 14 teaches that it is contrary to the natural order for a man to have long hair. Why is this? Verse 15 shows us. Long hair is a glory for the woman. It therefore would seem that for man to be wearing this glory is a paradox in the sight of God and of the angels. The glory of the woman must not be seen in the Church, whether displayed by women or men.

THE LORD’S APPEARANCE

To raise this subject usually calls forth some argument. Some say that the Lord Himself had long hair. Did He? How would we know from Scripture? Of this we have no certain knowledge. In any case,

His Son that God desires, not physical. The Spirit indeed is at work in all our lives seeking to transform us in heart and conduct to the Lord Himself. Speculation is no authority or excuse to contravene the clear instruction of the Word of God.

From where does the fashion of long-haired men come? In Revelation 9 there is a striking reference. There the hordes of hell erupt from the pit. They are seen as having the *“faces of men”* and *“the hair of women.”* Just as the Lord is transforming His saints into a moral and spiritual likeness to Christ, so the arch-enemy seeks to conform a multitude into a likeness which portrays a confusion of God’s natural order. Confusion of the sexes has always been a mark of depravity down the ages. It frequently has called forth the judgements of God.

This is not to say, however, that every young man who wears his hair long is rebelling in his heart against God. Many are not consciously doing so, but in the light of the Scriptures under consideration, they may be, all unwittingly, making themselves object lessons for the adversary against the standards set out in Scripture.

FOR TODAY?

The relevance of these verses (the bread and wine symbols do not suffer from this argument) is sometimes brought into question. It is implied that it was a Corinthian

HAIR OR HEART?

In conclusion let it be clearly understood that while outward form should convey inward condition, it is not always necessarily so. A woman, with the most adequate head covering and modest apparel, may be as cold as an iceberg in her devotion to the Lord, and all the while proud of her conformity to a set standard and her non-conformity to the world. Likewise, a short-haired man may be greatly grieving the Lord in other significant areas of his life. The long-haired youth, or the girl with uncovered hair may, in their hearts, be devoted to the Lord to the measure of the biblical light they have. They may be deeply committed to His cause and living blameless lives in the wicked society around them, but through spiritual infancy, or the failure of the elders and the teachers, have never learned the solemn implications of 1 Corinthians 11.

While the outward sign does not necessarily convey spirituality, nor the absence of it bespeak carnality, it is axiomatic that the submissive heart, willing to learn and to please the Lord who bought it, will be brought into the light of the Word of God suddenly or little by little, and will never risk a compromise.

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This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. (1 Tim. 1:15)

Why Did Jesus Come To This Planet?

Most people accept the reality of the historical Jesus. Indeed, apart altogether from the witness of Scripture, every coin in our western world carries a date which refers us back to the moment when the Lord Jesus came into the world. His birth divided secular history into BC “before Christ,” and AD “after Christ.” Also, most people celebrate Christmas and Easter, in a nominal way, which relate to how Christ came into the world, and how He left it. However, very few take the time to ask the question, “Why did Jesus come into the world?” Most people would say that He was a good man, and that the world would be a better place if only we would follow His example. However, this is not why the Lord Jesus came into the world. The text we refer to in this article gives us the real reason behind His coming. We read, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” The Lord Jesus Himself said, “The Son of Man is come to seek and to save, that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

The first thing we learn from these statements is that all of mankind is hopelessly lost on account of sin, and that the first step towards salvation is to confess that this is true of you as a person. Unless one comes to this point, there is no possibility of salvation. It is “sinners”

and the “lost” that Jesus came to save. Secondly, we cannot do anything to remedy matters ourselves. When the Lord Jesus was nearing the Cross, He prayed to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. We read, “He went a little further, and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39). This statement was made not so much for His sake, but for ours—to show us that there was no other way possible for our salvation than via the Cross. So to try and do it our way, is to say that the Lord Jesus need never have gone to the Cross.

The death of Christ in its sufficiency, has provided for the sins of the whole world

We also learn from our text that the statement, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” is a “faithful saying, worthy of all acceptance.” This means that the statement that “Jesus came to save sinners” is completely reliable; it is the very Word of God. To reject this statement is to throw doubt on God’s integrity. The next statement, “worthy of all acceptance” means worthy to be believed by all. So our text has a universal application to all. The death of Christ in its sufficiency, has provided for the sins of the whole world, not a narrow band of select sinners. Christ died for all, but only those who accept this truth into their hearts will

be saved. Those who reject it will be lost.

The text closes with the good news that Paul, the “chief of sinners” has been saved. This gives hope to the rest of sinners. Prior to his conversion, Paul, in his religious zeal, had killed Christians for a living and had thought he was doing God a service. But now the “chief” has been saved and his followers may follow suit. This tells us that there is no one too bad to be saved, and that in fact, being designated by the world system as “bad,” makes one a prime candidate for salvation. A person who does not argue about his merits, is on good ground to

be embraced by God’s salvation, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

May you, dear reader outside of Christ, be encouraged by our text to come to Christ exactly as you are—a sinner—and know His salvation in your heart and life for all of eternity. Remember this, the Lord Jesus also said, “Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

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SANCTUARY

Hast thou within a care so deep,
It chases from thine eyelids sleep?
To thy Redeemer take that care
And change anxiety to prayer.

Hast thou a hope, with which thy heart
Would almost feel it death to part?
Entreat thy God that hope to crown,
Or give thee strength to lay it down.

Whate'er the care that breaks thy rest,
Whate'er the wish that swells thy breast,
Spread before God that wish, that care,
And change anxiety to prayer.

—Author Unknown