

# COUNSEL



**PREACH THE WORD!**

**THE GAZE OF THE ALBATROSS**

**THE GOD OF PERFECT BALANCE**

**THOSE WHO CAUSE DIVISIONS**

**THE CHRISTIAN AND SICKNESS**

**GOD'S PURPOSE REVEALED**

**ARE YOU LEGALISTIC?**

**SUCCESS**

*May—June 2009*

# Preach the Word!

It is just over 35 years ago I first heard some supposedly well meaning Christians tell us that preaching was a thing of the past. The then modern generation could not learn from such an antiquated method as preaching. Although highly educated, it was argued that such moderns preferred to discover for themselves. Today's generation, we are likewise told, are visual and despite wide spread higher education, can only learn through short visual or audio sound bites.

Yet, it was the Holy Spirit, through Paul's second letter to Timothy, Who exhorts us to 'Preach the Word!' (2 Tim. 4:2) The word 'preach' is used 61 times in the New Testament. The first reference is to John the Baptist and the second reference is to the Lord Himself. The word means to proclaim or herald. The Greek scholar Thayer says it means

"to proclaim after the manner of a herald...always with the suggestion of formality, gravity and an authority which must be listened to and obeyed."

Preaching is a word that is only suitable to the subject of the gospel and Bible teaching since the subject matter is truth. In the affairs of men all knowledge is subject to review, further consideration, debate and correction. But the truth of God is not like that. There is no room for second opinions or further clarification. This why the gospel preacher is called to 'preach' that is in the sense of one heralding a message from a

king. It was a matter for obedience not debate.

This is not to say the preacher should be unfeeling towards his audience or worse act in a spirit of self righteousness. The Lord Himself serves as our example. While He never avoided faithfully proclaiming the truth, at the same time He always spoke with a sense of dignity and respect for His hearers. Even the scribes and Pharisees were treated by the Lord far better than they deserved. Here are the assessments of those who heard the Lord preach. *'And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.'* (Matt. 7:28) *'And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.'* (Luke 4:22) *'And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power.'* (Luke 4:32) *'Never man spake like this man.'* (John 7:46)

Have we lost confidence in the preaching of the Word of God? Likely no one would openly admit we have, but our actions are a better indicator of our true beliefs than our words are. How is it that so many assembly meetings are cluttered with things that do not contribute to the preaching of the Word? How is it that meetings to which the public are invited there is such a half hearted effort with a weak, watered down explanation of the gospel, often given without any sense of urgency? How is it that often Bible teaching lacks clarity or any recognizable aim to secure an action on the part of the hearers? How is it that in many assemblies there is no prayer meeting, or if one, a poorly attended one, prior to the preaching of the Word? Is there no sense of dependence on the Holy Spirit for help in power in

reaching the lost or moving the people of God? Do we think an invited speaker is capable of carrying the entire load of the spiritual demands of communicating the word of God that we can go without prayer?

And what about the preaching itself? Do those who preach come with a burden of the word of the Lord? Have we been guilty of merely entertaining audiences? Have we been looking to fill calendars and be popular? Do we think this will stand the assessment at the judgement seat of Christ?

And what about the resources we possess today? In the history of the church we have at the disposal of almost everyone, helps to equip us in the study of the scriptures, yet is such knowledge merely reaching the head without ever going to the heart?

Listen to Paul's words to Timothy. Kenneth Wuest's expanded translation helps us think about it afresh:

I solemnly charge you as one who is living in the presence of our God, even Christ Jesus, the One who is on the point of judging the living and the dead, I solemnly charge you as not only living in His presence, but also by His appearing and His kingdom; make a public proclamation of the Word with such formality, gravity, and authority as must be heeded. Hold yourself in readiness for this proclamation when opportunity presents itself and when it does not; reprove so as to bring forth conviction and confession of guilt; rebuke sharply, severely, and with a suggestion of impending penalty. Pleadingly exhort, doing all this with that utmost self-restraint which does not hastily retaliate a wrong, and accompany this exhortation with the most painstaking instruction. (2 Tim. 4:1, 2)

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**Brian Gunning**  
St. Catharines, Ontario



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# Are you LEGALISTIC?



**“Who are you to judge another’s servant? ... Let each be fully convinced in his own mind”  
(Rom. 14:4-5).**

It is a real put down to be called legalistic. It is almost like being called a Puritan. It seems to imply that one is unfeeling, cold and overly strict. Perhaps we need to define our terms. To be legal means that one’s actions are based upon the law—and that is a good thing. Who would want to live in a lawless society? Flowing from this it can mean “a strict and often too strict and literal adherence to the law or to a code.” Theologically it means “the doctrine of salvation by good works rather than by free grace” (Webster’s New World Dictionary).

**“[Legalistic] theologically it means “the doctrine of salvation by good works rather than by free grace.”**

Certainly all should strive to live a legal life, keeping the laws of the country in which we live, unless they conflict with our allegiance to our Lord. *“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities”* (Rom 13:1 NKJV) Christians should strive to be law-abiding citizens; that is part

of our testimony. The teaching that one's salvation is based upon his good works is heresy. In Paul's day the Judaizing teachers seemed to follow the preaching of the gospel and would insist that Christ was necessary but not enough. One must

obedience. Justification follows a life of sanctification. This is Roman Catholic theology. Paul emphasizes that you cannot mix grace and works for salvation. "I do not set aside the *grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law then Christ died in vain*"

and budget his money. He will get up at a regular time and have time reserved for the word of God and for prayer. He will seek to memorize Scripture and to witness often for the Lord. He will be faithful in attending and in participating in the

**“And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown but we for an imperishable crown ... I discipline my body and bring it into subjection...” (1 Cor. 9:25, 27).**

be circumcised and keep the Mosaic law (Acts 15:5). It was a big issue in the early church as Gentiles were accepting Christ and coming into the churches. Must they be circumcised and live by all of the regulations of Judaism? Was this necessary to their salvation? The council of the apostles and elders, led by the Holy Spirit, decided the Gentiles did not have to live like the Jews do. James summed up their decision: "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these you will do well" (Acts 15:28-29). They advised not doing things that would offend Jews, such as eating blood or things sacrificed to idols. And there was a warning against sexual immorality which was rampant among the Gentiles. There was no mention of circumcision or the Sabbath, signs of the old covenant to Israel. Today the danger of such legalism takes the form of saying that repentance and faith in Christ are not enough. Unless one is baptized and keeps the laws of Christ he cannot be saved. Salvation is promised after a life of

(Gal. 2:21). Some believe in salvation by grace alone but are rather strict in their life style. They do not believe that this strictness is part of their salvation but contributes to their sanctification. Here believers need to allow for individual conscience. Dress should be modest but does this mean that a woman's dress must

**“Some believe in salvation by grace alone but are rather strict in their life style.”**

reach the floor. Some TV programs are very evil but does that mean it is wrong to have a TV? On the Internet one may access pornography, does this mean it is wrong to own a computer? Paul would counsel: "Who are you to judge another's servant? ... Let each be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom. 14:4-5). And then there is self discipline. The disciplined life is the productive life. To please God and to be productive, to live life to the full, one will schedule his time

meetings of his assembly. Regular, proportionate giving will be a part of his disciplined life. Mentioning young Christians will be a priority of his life. He will endeavor to have regular, physical exercise and eat sensibly; his body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. He will guard the things that he watches, desiring to have a pure mind. Is this a legalistic life? No, but it is a disciplined life. "And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown but we for an imperishable crown ... I discipline my body and bring it into subjection..." (1 Cor. 9:25, 27). Such a disciplined life enabled Paul to say triumphantly at the end of his productive life: "I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. Finally there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4; 7-8). How will we finish?

---

**Donald L. Norbie**  
Greeley, Colorado



# The Gaze of the Albatross

I was leaning on the port quarter rail of the outdoor afterdeck of our huge ocean liner. The sun had never set this night in January (2008) in Antarctica; but now—early morning—it was riding high and brilliant in the sky. Our ship was inching very slowly forward through a narrow channel, made narrower by huge icebergs on either side of us. I felt as if I could almost reach out and touch the one that was passing by now on my side of the ship. Our ice captain assured that these were very old icebergs, which had been sitting in their present position for some years. They apparently extend to the bottom, down five hundred to six hundred feet, where they anchor themselves. Thus, not moving, they pose us no real threat as we squeeze past. The captain decided awhile ago that, by getting through this narrow passage, we could reach the open water that he could see a mile or two ahead, and thus save hours of cruising time toward our next point of interest.

A stiff wind was at my back, pushing me against the rail. It was blowing from starboard to port. I was lost in a reverie of thought, surveying the beauty of the icescape stretched for miles beyond me. Suddenly, I thought I detected a movement. Something had stirred. And then I saw it! Perhaps fifty feet below me, and maybe a hundred feet out,

perched on an icy pinnacle, stood a beautiful solitary albatross. He seemed to be looking straight at me. His black eyebrows, on either side of his regal white head, reached back toward the rear of his cranium in typically albatross style. Just beneath those brows dark penetrating eyes were staring, apparently straight at me. I was startled. Why was he there? This was not typical albatross behavior. It is very rare to see an albatross so close at hand, but not flying. Something about the demeanor of that beautiful bird suggested distress, frustration, even deep annoyance.

And then, suddenly, I understood why. An albatross cannot take off except with the help of wind. And the more wind the better. This albatross was frustrated, and unable to take off, because something had come between him and the wind. That something was our giant ship. He was in our wind shadow, and not liking it one little bit. For a long moment his eyes and mine seemed to focus on one another. I could hardly mistake his communication. He was, in effect, blaming the ship and me because he could not soar.

The moments passed. We watched one another. Suddenly, I saw his feathers ruffle. The passage of the ship was allowing the wind to reach him once more. The long yellow beak rose toward the breeze.

His regal head reached upward in a moment of happy triumph. The great white wings spread, the wind caught him, and he soared. With hardly a movement of those beautiful and powerful wings, he lifted skyward exactly to my level, then slowly swung around the stern of the ship, flying directly into the wind, and was gone.

But he left behind a message that reached my soul. As Christians, we cannot soar except if we are enjoying the uninhibited and empowering “wind” of the Spirit of God. So often it is things that come between us and that which enables us to soar. When such things intervene, like the beautiful albatross, we are grounded, frustrated, unhappy. It takes the uplifting power and glory of the Spirit of God to enable us to rise heavenward in soaring delight. Saint of God, how is it with you today? Are you soaring? Or has something come between you and the Spirit of God so that you are grounded as if stuck on the icy plateau of unfriendly time? As the voyage continued, we repeatedly saw albatross flying, usually at considerable distance. But never before, or since, have I seen one grounded because of “something between.”

---

**Doug Kazen**  
G,C

# Success

I tried, myself, to bring to pass  
That which I thought should be,  
I felt the Lord would profit by  
A little help from me.  
And so I worried and despaired  
And vainly laboured on  
Until my fairest plans had crashed,  
My choicest visions gone;  
And then I knelt before my Lord,  
Chastened, humbled, still,  
Ready to let Him work through me,  
Ready to do His will.  
And there it was I found success,  
For then alone my Lord could bless.

I tried to win a soul for Christ;  
How earnestly I pleaded  
That he had sinned and gone astray  
And Christ was all he needed.  
Begged him to forsake the world,  
Repent and be forgiven—  
I tried to coax him to the Lord,  
To woo him into Heaven.  
And then I realized that Christ  
Longed for him more than I,  
That He alone could make one care,  
Who cared enough to die.  
Upon my knees I fought the fight—  
My friend was born again that night.

—Barbara E. Cornet





# The God of Perfect Balance

## An Appreciation of Our Wonderful Saviour God

### 1. In His Intrinsic Worthiness

Perfect balance is stamped upon God's essential nature and Personality. He is three distinct Persons united in one indivisible Godhead, and all the members of that Godhead work together in perfect harmony and divine fellowship. He has many different attributes, but they all complement each other. For such, we find, is the God of the Scriptures whom we worship. On the one hand, 1 John 1 asserts that *'God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all'*, absolutely holy and righteous. But, on the other hand, this is balanced in 1 John 4 by the statement that *'God is love'*,

and gave His Only-begotten Son to die on the cross for mankind. Again, in John 4 we learn that *'God is a Spirit'*, life-giving and desiring

the worship of His creatures; while in Hebrews 12 we are warned that *'our God is a consuming fire'*, judging

all sin and sinners who refuse to repent. Apparently opposite aspects of God's nature are united in Him in perfect balance. His wrath is balanced by His love; His holiness by His grace. His power is used with greatest wisdom and goodness. He is inscrutable, yet known by those who trust Him and enjoy His eternal life. He is transcendent over His creation, yet immanent (actually present) in it. And, although He is invisible, He has revealed Himself in many ways. Truly, our God is a balanced Personal God worthy of all our worship for who He is.

### 2. In His Created World

The 'balance of nature' in creation reflects the balance of God Himself. Although it has been somewhat marred by the invasion of sin, and the consequent curse upon it, that balance is still observable in large measure. The created world is marked by variety and diversity in harmony and often unity. Both the flora and the fauna of the earth testify to this truth. And it is most evident in the constitution of the human body, in which many widely different organs and limbs are combined in harmonious unity. The very constitution of man, with his tripartite nature, body, soul, and spirit,

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reflects the triune nature of God Himself. The climate of the earth has been affected by sin, but the bal-

**“The created world is marked by variety and diversity in harmony and often unity.”**

ance of the four seasons, heat and cold, rain and sunshine still largely holds true. The recent phenomenon of global warming, caused probably by our modern way of living, has somewhat disturbed this pattern, but God’s promise to Noah in Genesis 9 concerning creation after the Flood judgement is still generally being fulfilled. The God of creation is a faithful God and a benevolent Ruler of all things.

**3. In His Revealed Word**

We shall divide this section into the written Word of God, the Scriptures, and the Incarnate Word of God, Christ the Son of God Himself. For both aspects of divine revelation bear witness to a remarkable balance between diverse elements.

The Bible was written over a long period of at least fifteen hundred years by a few dozen authors with very diverse backgrounds and characters, but it still exhibits a remarkable unity of theme and purpose. God has been pleased to balance the talents of many different men to produce a book which can meet the deepest needs of all peoples everywhere. It includes many different kinds of literature, such as history, law, poetry, proverbs, prophecy, letters, and apocalyptic books, and provides a balanced diet for all men to feed upon spiritually. It saves the souls of those who believe it, and can

instruct, correct, and guide believers from all races and backgrounds. No other book is like it, just as its divine Author, the Holy Spirit of God, is unique. Perfect balance marks all the written revelation of God.

All Christians everywhere recognise the perfect balance that marks the Person and character of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word. In His nature He is uniquely

‘Verily God,  
Yet become truly human,  
Lower than angels  
To die in our stead’.

Both the perfect Deity and the absolutely sinless and holy Manhood of Christ were predicted in the Old Testament Scriptures, are attested on

**“The Bible ... exhibits a remarkable unity of theme and purpose.”**

every page of the gospel records, and expounded in the New Testament letters. ‘*In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*’; Colossians 2:9. Every divine attribute and characteristic of deity is seen in the humanity of Christ in perfect balance. He was ‘*full of grace and truth*’; John 1:14. In Him they do not conflict, but blend perfectly. There was a consistent evenness in Christ’s character and temperament. No one trait predominated over the rest, as is so often the case with us, even as believers. His earthly life was like the fine flour of the meal offering, which typified Him. The Man Christ Jesus thus revealed the perfect balance which marks the whole Godhead.

**4. In His Characteristic Ways**

The ways of God with men are again marked by a perfect balance between characteristics which we would naturally think to be irreconcilable opposites.

For instance, in Isaiah 57:15 the Lord says, ‘*For thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit*’. So great is our God, transcendent, and unapproachable in glory and holiness; yet in amazing grace He condescends to dwell, and deal with those who take their rightful place before Him in humility and contrition. And, although He is the almighty Lord of hosts, the heavenly armies, yet He is concerned to help the poor, afflicted, and oppressed; see 1 Samuel 1:11 and James 5:4.

Furthermore, His ways with sinful men are always marked by both ‘goodness and severity’, as Israel has proved in their history; Romans 11:22. God punishes His erring people, but

**“He is the almighty Lord of hosts, the heavenly armies, yet He is concerned to help the poor, afflicted, and oppressed.”**

does not break His unconditional covenants with them. All believers can re-echo the words of the hymn,

‘With mercy and with judgement my web of time He wove,  
and aye the dews of sorrow  
were lusted with His love’.

For God is the Grand Weaver of all the strands of our life into the pattern of His choice and

## **“But God’s balance is seen in sharpest focus in the Cross of Christ crucified.”**

will. Both grace and government are seen in His ways. He allows men, believing and unbelieving alike, to reap both the good and evil that they sow; but He is very kind and longsuffering with us all and slow to anger.

Finally, God is marked by apparently opposite emotions in response to mankind’s behaviour towards Him. He *‘is angry with the wicked every day’*, as Psalm 7:11 states, but pleased with men of faith in Him; Hebrews 11:5. He is very sorrowful over His people Israel’s sins, but will be joyful over their restoration; Zephaniah 3:17. And while He is very grieved at gross human wickedness (Genesis 6:6), He can afford to laugh at the puny efforts of rebellious men to oppose Him (Ps. 2:4), and at their consequent calamity. Truly, as Isaiah 55:8-9 says, God’s ways and thoughts are in-

initely higher than any of our ways and thoughts. Yes, we find that we live in a morally balanced universe controlled by a God of perfectly balanced character.

### **5. In His Saving Work**

But God’s balance is seen in sharpest focus in the Cross of Christ crucified. In God’s work of propitiation apparently diverse aspects of His nature and attributes are united in perfect harmony. For, on the one hand, Calvary is the clearest evidence of God’s hatred of human sin, since there His Beloved Son bore God’s righteous wrath against it; but, on the other hand, it is also the most wonderful proof of God’s causeless and self-sacrificial love for the sinner. What His holiness required His love provided. At Calvary God punished His Own Incarnate Son, the Maker of all things, for man His creature’s sin. So that in the cross of Christ the words of Psalm 85:10 find fulfilment: *‘Mercy*

paradoxical statement. At Calvary the Sinless One *‘was made sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him’*; 2 Corinthians 5:21. Also, there the Ever-living One became dead for a short time; Revelation 1:18. Thus the apparent weakness and foolishness of the cross is really the supreme manifestation of God’s power and wisdom; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25. Only God knew how to solve the problem of sin in His world. How wonderful is our Saviour God, exhibiting a harmonious blend of different attributes in perfect balance at the Cross!

### **6. In His Sovereign Will**

Even in the exercise of His sovereign will God shows perfect balance. For He never overrides the freedom of choice that He gave His creature man when He made him in His own image. God simply overrules all the decisions made by our human wills to bring to pass His own eternal and pre-determined purposes, whether

## **“He is not harsh, or coercive in the exercise of His rightful sovereignty, but always benevolent, longsuffering, and responsive to us.”**

*and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other’*. Calvary is *‘the trysting-place, where heaven’s love and heaven’s justice meet’*. Isaiah 45:21 called the Lord, *‘a just God and a Saviour’*; a paradox, but explained by Calvary. Similarly, in Romans 3:26, Paul, after proclaiming the truth of God’s propitiation through Christ at the cross, goes on to say that on this basis God can be both *‘just and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus’*; another

our decisions are good or evil. His sovereign grace in saving us does not override His demand that implicit faith and complete obedience be exercised by us, His people. Also, although God is immutable, always *‘the Same’*, Scripture records many occasions when He repented of the judgement with which He had threatened men, at least for a time, in response to their repentant and contrite attitude. And Moses, especially, was able to wield great power

in intercessory prayer with the Lord on behalf of His sinful earthly people Israel by pleading that God's greater glory and name were at stake in the judgement threatened. Finally, all true Christians find that, although they have become bond-slaves of God and Christ, and have yielded all personal rights to Him, they are

*of the body unto the edifying of itself in love*'. In this balanced way the body of Christ grows up into Christ, who is its Head in heaven. Thus the one New Man witnesses on earth to Christ in heaven. Any group of believers in a locality may seem to most people to be a rather motley collection of very different individu-

will be no schisms in the body, nor stunted growth in any of its members. Balance between possible extremes need not be compromise, if we emphasise both aspects of any truth equally strongly. The middle way is not a way of indecision or compromise with the truth, but of bal-

**“However, our effectiveness as His witnesses depends partly on our obedient functioning in the local body of Christ. And that in turn depends upon how balanced we individual believers are in our Christian lives and testimonies.”**

in that service more truly free in spirit to find fulfilment in their lives than they were before they bowed to God's sovereignty and Christ's absolute Lordship. He is not harsh, or coercive in the exercise of His rightful sovereignty, but always benevolent, longsuffering, and responsive to us. Such is the perfect balance found in our Sovereign God.

### **7. In His Chosen Witnesses**

Now the balance found in God is found to a large extent in the constitution of Christ's Body, the Church, today. For concerning the members of the local body of Christ, which is in many ways a microcosm of the Church universal, it is said in 1 Corinthians 11:24 that, *'God hath tempered the body together'*, so that all parts, prominent and otherwise, have an essential place and function in the working of that body, none being superfluous. And in Ephesians 4:16 Paul states concerning the Church universal that *'the whole body' is 'fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part,'* and so *'maketh increase*

als, but God has formed them into a vital unity as His witnesses in that place. All their different gifts are important to God, and should be recognised by fellow-saints.

However, our effectiveness as His witnesses depends partly on our obedient functioning in the local body of Christ. And that in turn depends upon how balanced we individual believers are in our Christian lives and testimonies. For Christian maturity lies in the development of a character which is balanced like that of God Himself, combining all apparent opposites in perfect harmony. There are usually two dangers to avoid: that of legality, which adds to Scripture various rules and regulations that are not in it; and that of licence, which ignores and blatantly disobeys clear injunctions of Scripture in defiant rebellion. If we follow just what Scripture says, neither more nor less, we shall not go far astray from the path that pleases God. As Ephesians 4:15 says, we should speak *'the truth in love'* to one another. For the truth lovingly and graciously spoken can disarm much possible opposition to it. Then there

ance and maturity in handling both it and the people affected by it. The fact is that the perfect balance found in God is prescriptive for us as His children; we should aim to be as well-balanced as He is.

The arrogant Babylonian king Belshazzar was once weighed in God's balances and found sadly wanting. By contrast with him, we have endeavoured in this article to explain just how perfectly balanced our wonderful Saviour God is in every aspect of His nature and attributes, ways and works. May we as His chosen witnesses in this world not be found wanting balance, but rather become increasingly mature and well-balanced Christians, more like Him every day of our lives on earth.

---

**Malcolm C. Davis**  
Leeds, U.K.

***“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learnt; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf; but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil. And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen”*** (Rom. 16: 17-20).

It is obvious that the Apostle of the gentiles had, by inspiration from the Holy Spirit, felt the necessity of writing this clear warning to the believers in Rome at the end of his great epistle to them. Paul had not been to Rome as yet and he had not seen the saints there by face, yet he must have been given an understanding of the dangers lurking around the assemblies there. Namely that of men who, for personal gain, made it their business to divide the church into parties and to put stumbling blocks in the ways of the believers.

It may surprise us that this kind of activity could have taken place in the apostolic age. But we should not forget that Satan has always been actively harassing the infant church then, and is still doing the same even in our time now. He is expert in using personal pride and carnal mindedness in some who may be in leadership positions or in a teaching

# Those Who Cause DIVISIONS



capacity, to feed a desire in them for supremacy among the flock.

A proud and insubordinate spirit is a dangerous thing among those who are teachers of the Word both in a public and in a private capacity. We all, sheep and shepherds, need to have a dependence on the grace of our Lord, accompanied by a consciousness of the divine authority of the Scriptures of truth. We also need to realize that Truth has its source in Christ alone. Such a godly and a

to hear about something new! (Act. 17:21). Such activity of the flesh may result in leading some of the weak in the flock astray; to the hurt of both hearers and speakers. Divine revelation in the Scriptures and not man's thoughts about it, is the only means of guarding the glory of Christ and maintaining the well-being of believers. Resorting to man's thoughts and expedencies may succeed in creating a school of thought, and in drawing disciples around a human

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humble attitude would help to keep us right, but this is most important for those who are apt to teach.

The danger for those who are teachers among us is to have a tendency towards resorting to the thoughts of man rather than to the Scriptures. To depend on our mental abilities in teaching may satisfy a sense of personal importance. And it could well be met with excitement from some of the hearers who might be looking for novelty of ideas. Remember how the Athenians were always looking

leader, (Act. 20:30). But the sword of the Spirit, used by Him, will judge the flesh, nourish the new man in the believer and cause the edification of the body of Christ to the glory of God.

The saints in Rome had to be warned against the activity of such men who, for their own purposes, caused schism in the body.

The situation is not different today, for sadly we all know that the flesh in the believer always seeks its own glory not the glory of Christ. And

there are still among us those who consciously or unconsciously pursue such a course in the assemblies.

The Holy Spirit judged that those individuals in Rome were not servants of the Lord, even though they may have boasted of being so. The expression *"their own belly"* describes their desire to satisfy their appetites for recognition by others, for the occupation of the place of notoriety and for the wielding of authority over the people of God. They may fake an appearance of superior spirituality, but the Spirit speaks very negatively of their work. *"For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth"* (2 Cor. 10: 18).

Contrary to the doctrine taught to the believers and in the process of their planning and scheming to have a following among the flock, they end up offending the saints especially the more innocent ones. Their methods of entering in were to use good words and fair speeches thus deceiving the unsuspecting younger believers. This reminds us of the activity of the Judiazers in the Churches of Galatia who were described as *"False brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus"* (Gal. 2:4). This technique is still being used by false teachers today, where they come in not announcing their intentions until they have gained a foothold inside the assembly. The Divine injunction here is to first mark such ones and then to avoid them. As Paul said about the false brethren in Galatia *"To whom we gave place by subjection, no not for an hour"* (Gal. 2:5). That is to say not allowing them to influence our thinking or impact our walk with the Lord.

But the saints in Rome had shown

by their obedience to the Lord that they were not taken in by the deception of the false teachers. And their reputation in this regard has become well known to the other churches.

This gave the apostle something to rejoice about, yet he found it necessary to further warn them to be on guard for that continued danger.

What follows was an advice to them concerning the Divine remedy for what they were facing, *"But yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil"* (v.

**"The enemy may thrust hard at the child of God but the LORD's help is always at hand"**

19). The Savior in His days of humiliation said the same to the disciples about combining the prudence of the serpents with the harmlessness of doves (Matt. 10:16).

Human wisdom dictates that to guard yourself you must be thoroughly acquainted with the world and all its evil ways. This is the wisdom which James describes as being not from above but earthly sensual and demoniacal. I need not as a child of God to know all about the wickedness and the corruption that is in the world today nor do I have to cultivate an acquaintance with the depths of Satan. I need only to know all that is good in Christ and to delight myself in knowing Him personally. This is the wisdom that is from above which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated. My ears have to be tuned to hearing the voice of the Shepherd

for I know not the voice of strangers and will not follow them. This should be the only path of safety for the child of God in a world that rejected and crucified His Son.

And this world is now under the control of the prince of the power of the air who seems to be ruling supreme over the hearts of its inhabitants who know not God and who obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The true child of God has the secret of victory over Satan in the crucifixion and the resurrection of the Savior, who through death has destroyed him that had the power of death, and then rose again victorious over death and hell. Yet I may not see in my state of infirmity now any sign of a coming and final victory over him. But the Holy Spirit here assures us that the God of peace shall bruise him under our feet (v. 20). In our impatience we may ask how long?

But a most comforting word follows here *"shortly"* and faith can rest on such a promise.

Finally we have the apostle's prayer for them that *"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen"* (v. 20). What an endless resource of power and comfort His grace is. They needed it then to achieve such goals and we need it now as well.

I need thee precious Savior!  
I need thee day by day,  
To fill me with thy fullness,  
To lead me on the way,  
I need thy Holy Spirit,  
To teach me what I am  
To show me more of Jesus,  
To point me to the Lamb

—Fredrick Whitfield

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*"Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. (It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was. Then after that saith he to his disciples, Let us go into Judaea again. His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again? Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him. These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him. Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellowdisciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:1-16).*

# The Christian and Sickness

Sickness and death are common things in our sin-stricken world. Sooner or later they enter into our homes and families and, of course, into our own personal experience. Some may escape serious illness in life, but no one escapes physical death (except those who will be caught up to heaven at the time of the rapture). All true believers have reason to rejoice in the Lord's words upon the matters of sickness and death in John 11:1-16.

It is noteworthy that between John 10 and 11 comes Luke 11:1-17:10, and the events recorded in John 11 fall between Luke 17:10-11.

There are at least five significant things about the Christian and sickness in John 11:1-16.

## **Those whom the Lord loves are sometimes sick (11:3)**

In general, Christians do not escape the common adversities of life any more than non-Christians. We

**“Such a passage of Scripture as this should strengthen our faith in the living, risen Christ, whose power shall ultimately sweep away all sickness and death”**

Such a passage of Scripture as this should strengthen our faith in the living, risen Christ, whose power shall ultimately sweep away all sickness and death (Rev. 21:4). Also, these verses should comfort the heart of those among the Lord's people who are either sick themselves, or else have loved ones who are ill.

Someone has said, “The worth of a man's religion is determined by the help it affords him in dark days.” Another has said, “There are no great souls without great trials.” And it was John Hilton who wrote, “Who can suffer best, best can do.”

are not told the nature of Lazarus' illness, but the fact that he was deathly-sick is implied by the Greek word translated “sick” (*asthenei*). It is used, for instance, to describe a great multitude of sick folk in John 5:3 and of the nameless infirm man of that chapter in verse 7, the word in both instances having been translated “impotent.” Dr. Luke used the same word in relation to Dorcas' illness (Acts 9:37), while the Apostle Paul used it to describe Epaphroditus' sickness (Phil. 2:26-27). That Lazarus was seriously ill was, of course, confirmed by his

consequent death. Mary and Martha would never have sent for the Lord Jesus Christ had their brother merely succumbed to some minor malady.

Bethany means “house of affliction,” and this is exactly where

**“And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me” (Ps. 50:15).**

many of God’s people find themselves today because of sickness and its consequent suffering.

A second thing is that Having sensed the seriousness of Lazarus’ illness (perhaps he had already lapsed into a semi-conscious or comatose state), Mary and Martha sent for the Lord Jesus. Whenever any kind of emergency arises, large or small, this is what every child of God has a right to do and should do. It was the psalmist who said, *“And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me”* (Ps. 50:15), and it was Peter who wrote, *“Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you”* (1 Pet. 5:7).

At this point a little digression on the persons of Mary and Martha will prove instructive. That Martha was evidently the oldest is indicated in Luke 10:38. The spiritual difference and temperament of the two sisters are revealed in Luke 10:38-42. Mary received from Christ; Martha ministered unto Christ. Of Mary, the Lord Jesus said she *“hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from*

*her”* (Luke 10:42).

What a beautiful Bible biography Mary has—she is always seen at the feet of Christ. The great lesson to be learned (and we are often slow to learn it) is that we need to receive from the Lord before we can effectively minister to Him through service. In other words, in the divine order of things, waiting upon the Lord—which involves our worship of Him—comes before our witness.

**Sickness is often for the glory of God. (11:4)**

Sickness is not necessarily due to sin, although sin and suffering are very definitely connected (Matt. 9:2). The disciples on a previous occasion

**“Sickness is not necessarily due to sin, although sin and suffering are very definitely connected”**

expressed the typical views current at that time, attributing suffering to a person’s sin or to his parents’ sin (see John 9:2 with Ex. 20:5). Job’s three “friends,” Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, while differing in their viewpoints, basically believed that suffering was due to sin. Our main concern today should not be with the causes of suffering but with its remedy.

Furthermore, it should be remembered that sickness is not necessarily a sign of a lack of faith, nor a mark of the Lord’s disapproval. In the case of Lazarus his sickness was for the glory of God, and this is prob-

ably true in the experience of most of God’s people who are laid aside, though the words of 1 Corinthians 11:29 & 30 are worthy of thoughtful contemplation, as well as James 5:14-15 and 1 John 5:16. Obviously, some instances of illness are directly due to sin in the life of the believer.

When Christ said, *“This sickness is not unto death . . .”* (11:4), He meant that death would not be the final end. Why didn’t He tell Lazarus’ sisters what He intended to do? The answer is simple and clear. The Lord would keep us exercised as to our faith and patience. Let us always remember that God has a purpose behind every detail of our life, and in the case of Lazarus his sickness was for God’s glory (our Saviour’s words in 11:4 are right in line with His statement in 9:3; see 2:11 & 14:13), also keeping in mind that the glory of God the Father is one with the glory of God the Son (5:23).

**Sickness is often Prolonged (11:6).**

Christians should always bear in mind that our Lord’s delays are not denials. Some of God’s choicest saints have suffered for many years without relief or

**“Christians should always bear in mind that our Lord’s delays are not denials”**

healing. Such have simply bowed to His will and expressed faith in His promises, as for example the psalmist's words, "My times are in thy hand" (Ps. 31: 15).

W. Graham Scroggie has said,

"How amazing are verses 5 and 6! But learn from them that delay is neither destitution (4), nor desertion (5, 6), nor denial (7). The Divine love sometimes lingers. When God waits, we should wait."

**Sickness may come that others might be led to believe on Christ (11:15).**

In many instances Christians who have been laid aside through illness are used to lead others to believe on Christ, as well as to encourage and strengthen the faith of their fellow saints. It has frequently been my experience to visit a seriously ill or infirm saint with a view to being a

**"The worth of a man's religion is determined by the help it affords him in dark days."**

blessing and bringing a little cheer, only to come away blessed and cheered in my own soul.

Miriam Booth, the daughter of the founder of the Salvation Army, a beautiful, brilliant, cultured woman, began her Christian work with great promise. However, disease soon laid hold of her and she was brought to the point of death. When visited one day by a friend, the well-meaning

friend remarked that it was a pity one so capable should be hindered by sickness from doing the Lord's work. Whereupon she replied, "It's great to do the Lord's work, but it is greater to do the Lord's will." Miriam

**"It's great to do the Lord's work, but it is greater to do the Lord's will."**

**— Miriam Booth**

Booth's words reveal a peaceful submission to God's sovereign will, as well as a deep-rooted faith that He makes no mistakes, but doeth all things well. Such a testimony most surely glorifies God and serves as a blessing to others.

In John 11:7 & 8 we read, "Then, after that, saith He to His disciples, Let us go into Judea again. His disciples say unto Him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou there again?" Here, Christ tested His disciples. We then read, "Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him" (vv. 9 & 10). Among other things, these words indicate that we each have an allotted time to work and we need to abide in our Lord. Christ worked according to a definite and pre-planned timetable. In like manner, God has a plan for every life and it is infinitely important that we respond to it and, by

His grace, carry it out for His glory. In view of all this, Thomas' pessimism expressed in verse 16 was unnecessary: "Then said Thomas, who is called Didymus, unto his fellow-disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

Note that Christ said He could go to Lazarus (v. 15), even though Lazarus could not go to Him. This suggests to our hearts that nothing, not even death itself, can separate us from the Lord Jesus Christ (see Rom. 8:35-39).

A keynote to remember from this passage has been expressed by George Goodman:

"The first thing in illness is not to get better, but to learn the lesson God is teaching."

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"The first thing in illness is not to get better, but to learn the lesson God is teaching."**

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**W. Ross Rainey**  
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# God's Purpose Revealed



It seems incredible that forty years passed with scarcely a word since this young son had been pulled out of the river. In all the early years of his experience Moses was not aware that God was preparing him to become a leader of His people. In our own spiritual growth we are often unaware of where this training will ultimately lead in the counsels of God! Every experience He brings us through, whether good or painful, builds character and brings fitness for His service.

Moses did not realize, while learning *“all the wisdom of the Egyptians”* (Acts 7:22), that God had other plans for his life. Here was a young man with the world at his feet—with power, riches, wisdom and all the other things that go along with it. One day Moses left the splendor of the palace and came to his brethren and his heart was moved as he saw their plight. A Hebrew slave was being beaten by an Egyptian. So Moses, thinking no one was around, slew

the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. How often we think that when wrong actions are done, no one will ever know! However, whatever is done in secret will be made manifest. Maybe not at the immediate

way out was to run away from it all.

Many have lived lives like this—always on the run, never stopping to confess their sins and to seek God’s forgiveness and peace. Remember our first parents in the Garden of

**“Moses did not realize, while learning ‘all the wisdom of the Egyptians’... that God had other plans for his life.”**

moment, but in due course, it will be brought to light. The very next day Moses was confronted about his actions when he came upon two Hebrews who were fighting one another. As Moses sought to intervene, the wrongdoer challenged him, *“Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?”* (Ex. 2:14). This pierced the conscience of Moses. He became afraid and fled into the desert. Sin always brings a troubled conscience, awakening fear in the heart. The easy

Eden when they sinned! First, they tried to cover up their sin by making a garment of fig leaves, but this did not help. Then they were afraid, and hid themselves. In other words, they tried to run away from the situation, but this also did not work. It was only when they heard the voice of God speaking to them that they came out from their hiding.

God was now able to give them a true covering for their sin. A sacrifice was made, blood was shed, and an innocent victim died so that a



**“Good leaders among God’s people will rule, not with a rod of iron, but with a tender loving care for the flock of God.”**

covering of skin could be provided. This is a picture of the greater sacrifice that took place at Calvary. Here the sinless Saviour died for our sins, and provided the garment of His righteousness as a true covering for all our sin. To all who are running away from God because of sin the message is: stop running, and trust Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Then you will know that true peace which He alone can bring. For those who have drifted away from the Lord because of sin, there is still a remedy. First John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from **all** unrighteousness.”

Looking back again on the events that were taking place in Egypt, there are some valuable things to

consider. When the enemy attacks and opposition comes, we can expect similar problems to these. It is sad when God’s people are fighting among themselves. Paul, in 1st Corinthians chapter 1, addressing the church at Corinth, exhorts that there be no divisions among them. He highlights the source of the problem. They were saying, “‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Cephas,’ or ‘I am of Christ’” (v. 12). They were using various men as leaders of groups when these men were only ministers through whom they believed. Those servant leaders were not in competition with each other, but were a complement to each other in the work of God. There is always a great danger when men are put on a pedestal

and we follow them. It is generally true that most divisions among the Lord’s people are the result of personality clashes, and are not over teaching of the Word of God. Consider the beautiful words of the psalmist in Psalm 133:1-3:

*Behold, how good  
and how pleasant it is  
For brethren  
to dwell together in unity!  
It is like the precious oil  
upon the head,  
Running down on the beard,  
The beard of Aaron,  
Running down on the edge  
of his garments.  
It is like the dew of Hermon,  
Descending upon  
the mountains of Zion;  
For there the LORD commanded  
the blessing—Life forevermore.*

Note the simple exhortation to two devoted sisters who laboured with Paul in the gospel “to be of the same mind in the Lord” (Phil. 4:2). In fact, to the whole assembly he writes, “Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one ac-

cord, of one mind" (2:2). There will always be conflicts which need to be resolved, but may the Lord give grace to bear and forbear bringing honour and glory to our Lord Jesus Christ. "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

Coming back again to our "man on the run" it is interesting how a changed set of circumstances brought him into an entirely new role. God was going to further equip him for what lay ahead. He now moved from Egypt to dwell in the land of Midian.

## **"It is generally true that most divisions among the Lord's people are the result of personality clashes, and are not over teaching of the Word of God."**

It is here that he sat down by a well and the seven daughters of Ruel, the priest of Midian, came with their father's flocks to draw water. The young women were challenged by shepherds who tried to drive them away from the well. Once again we see Moses entering into conflict as he stands up to defend the girls and the sheep. This is where we see his true shepherd heart taking over in defence of the flock. This man, who in a later day would lead the people of God as a mighty army, had the heart of a shepherd. We also remember David in this connection, as well as "The good shepherd [who] gives His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Good leaders among God's people will rule, not with a rod of iron, but with a tender loving care for the flock of God. The defence of those flocks brought Moses to the household of Jethro where he was introduced as

an Egyptian. Although a Hebrew, he was still wearing the princely garment of an Egyptian.

Already we have seen that Egypt speaks of the world. So we have here a picture of a believer who still shows characteristics of the world. As you read this today, what is your relationship to the world? How do others see you? Are you being identified with the Lord Jesus Christ, or are you no different from the world? The disciples

were first called Christians at Antioch (Acts 11:26). It is here they were identified as being Christ's ones! Do others truly see we are associated with the Lord Jesus Christ? How beautiful the words in John 17:16, "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world." James, in his epistle, reminds us, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?" (4:4). God does not expect us to be isolated from the world, but to be separate from its false ways!

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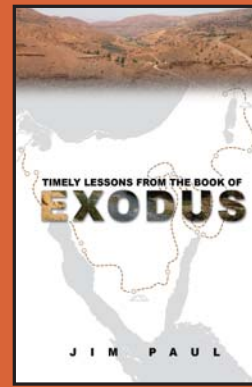
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## My Prayer

I do not ask that I may steer  
My bark by peaceful shore alone,  
Nor that I linger, harbor-bound,  
And sail no stormy seas unknown;  
I only ask this boon of Thee:  
Be ever in the ship with me.

I do not ask that I may dwell  
From din of battle far removed,  
Nor ever feel temptation's force,  
Nor ever know mine armour proved;  
I only ask, through Life's long fight,  
Grant me the power of Thy might.

I do not ask that I may walk  
Only on smoothly trodden grass,  
Nor ever climb the mountain's height  
And trembling, through its dangers pass;  
I only ask, on rock or sand,  
The sure upholding of Thy hand.

I dare not pray for any gift  
Upon my pilgrim path to Heaven;  
I only ask one thing of Thee:  
Give Thou Thyself and all is given.  
I am not strong nor brave nor wise;  
Be Thou with me – it shall suffice.

—Annie Johnson Flint