

*WHAT EVERY
CHRISTIAN
SHOULD
KNOW*

STUDIES 1 - 10

TEACHER MANUAL

Stephen Nemeth Lectures

What Every Christian Should Know

**Studies 1 - 10
Teacher Manual**

<i>TABLE OF CONTENTS</i>

<u>Study</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Pages</u>
1	The Bible: God's Miracle Book	1
2	The Meaning And Method Of God's Salvation	6
3	The Guarantee Of God's Keeping Power	14
4	Some Things That God Puts First	20
5	The Power Of Prevailing Prayer	27
6	Knowing And Doing The Will Of God	35
7	How To Enjoy The Bible	41
8	The Real Meaning Of Christian Fellowship	48
9	God's Plan For World Evangelization	54
10	The Kind Of People We Ought To Be	61

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THE BIBLE: GOD'S MIRACLE BOOK

STUDY 1

Scripture Portions: Psalm 119:89-104

Key Verses: Revelation 22:18-19

Revelation 22:18-19 - *For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:*

19 And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

The Bible is a very wonderful book. It is a composite library of 66 books, of which 39 comprise the Old Testament and 27 the New Testament. The Bible is unique, for it is no mere haphazard collection of writing, but is an organic whole, each of the 66 books being necessary to the whole 'library'.

Any careful reader will quickly discover that there is a plan behind the arrangement of the books, and a unity about the Bible that is nothing less than miraculous. This is why we have entitled this study "The Bible: God's Miracle Book".

The Bible is inspired, authoritative and entirely trustworthy. What are the grounds for believing this? Consider the following.

THE WONDER OF ITS FORMATION.

The Old Testament may be divided into four sections:

- The Pentateuch - Genesis to Deuteronomy.
- The historical books - Joshua to Job.
- The poetical books - Psalms to Song of Solomon.
- The prophetic books - Isaiah to Malachi.

The New Testament may be divided into three sections:

- The historical books - Matthew to Acts.
- The doctrinal books - Romans to Jude.
- The great book of prophecy - The Revelation.

But from where did these 66 books come? How were they written, and by whom? How were they brought together in one volume?

Here is a miracle of tremendous significance!

The 66 books of the Bible were written by some 40 different writers, who lived in different countries, spoke different languages and came from different backgrounds. The writers included a king, a doctor, a herdsman, a tax gatherer, a theologian, a scribe, a fisherman, etc. Their writings spread over a period of 1600 years, so there could be no collusion or communication.

Think of it - 40 different writers, spread over 55 generations, producing 66 books. Yet, when these books are placed together, there is a perfect unity and harmony about them. They all fit together like a jigsaw puzzle. What is the explanation?

There is only one explanation: the Bible is God's miracle book.

THE CLAIM OF ITS WRITERS.

God is the Author of the Bible, but He employed many human writers. These 40 writers claimed to be writing down the words of the Lord. 'Thus saith the Lord.....' and similar expressions occur hundreds of times in the Bible. Compare -

Exodus 20:1 - *And God spake all these words, saying,*

Exodus 20:24 - *An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.*

In the 27 chapters of Leviticus there are 56 assertions assigning its authorship to the Lord Himself. The same is true of the historical, the poetical and the prophetic books of the Old Testament.

What about the New Testament? The Old Testament is the warp and woof of the New Testament. Literally scores of Old Testament sayings are quoted in the New Testament. Jesus, the Gospel writers Paul, Peter, James and John all accepted the divine authority and authorship of the Old Testament.

2 Timothy 3:16 - *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:*

2 Peter 1:21 - *For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*

What is the explanation of the fact that the writers in the Bible claim to have written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit?

The explanation is this: the Bible is God's miracle book.

THE ACCURACY OF ITS STATEMENTS.

It is commonly held that the Bible is full of errors and mis-statements. Let us understand that there are many things in the Bible about which we need fuller light. But let us also state confidently that the Bible is accurate and reliable. What seem to be discrepancies are often cleared away after careful and prayerful investigation.

Psalm 119:160 - *Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.*

There is not one single proved inaccuracy in the whole Bible. The Bible is accurate historically, geographically, genealogically, scientifically, psychologically, typologically and verbally.

What is the secret of this amazing accuracy? The Bible is God's miracle book.

4. THE PROGRESSIVENESS OF ITS REVELATION.

The revelation of truth we have in the Bible is progressively given. By the time we get to the **Book of Revelation** we have a perfect and complete body of truth. In the 66 books, there is everything we need to know about ourselves, sin, death, Heaven, human destiny, human relations and, above all, about God and His nature, about Christ and His love, and about redemption. The revelation in the Bible is complete.

Jude 3 - *Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*

There is everything we need in the Bible: the Bible is God's miracle book.

THE FULFILLMENT OF ITS PROPHECIES.

Two-thirds of the Bible is made up of prophecies. Prophecy is history written in advance. Only a small portion of these prophecies has so far been fulfilled, but all fulfilled prophecy has been literally fulfilled. In the Bible we have prophecies relating to places, events and persons.

A most helpful approach to this subject would be to study the Old Testament prophecies relating to the Person of Christ and see them literally fulfilled in His birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension. Note also that over 30 prophecies relating to His

arrest, trial and crucifixion were all literally fulfilled within 24 hours when He died.

What is the explanation of the power of this book to predict the future? The Bible is God's miracle book.

6. THE INSISTENCE OF ITS MESSAGE.

One message runs right through the Bible - the message of God's great love for sinful humanity, the gift of His Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; of His provision of salvation, and of His righteous claims perfectly satisfied at Calvary.

Genesis 3:15 - *And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

Throughout the Bible we trace the message of -

John 3:16 - *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

until we come to the final appeal to sinful men to accept the Gospel invitation -

Revelation 22:17 - *And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*

What is the explanation of this one insistent message running through the Bible? The Bible is God's miracle book.

But, as we conclude this study, notice one final evidence of the Bible's unique nature, inspiration and authority. It is to be found in -

7. THE EXPLANATION OF IT AUTHOR.

What is the explanation of the miraculous nature of the Bible? The answer is stated in -

1 Timothy 3:16 - *And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.*

2 Peter 1:21 - *For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*

These verses proclaim the inspiration of the Old Testament scripture.

The following verses refer to the inspiration of the writers of the books of the New Testament.

John 14:26 - *But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.*

John 16:13 - *Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come.*

Thank God, the Bible is God-given, fully inspired, completely authoritative and absolutely trustworthy! It truly is God's miracle book. Let us love it, believe, learn it, practise it, defend it and pass it on to others.

THE MEANING AND METHOD OF GOD'S SALVATION

STUDY 2

Scripture Portions: 1 Peter 1:1-12

Key Verse: 1 Peter 1:9

1 Peter 1:1-12 - *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,*

2 Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:

9 Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.

10 Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you:

11 Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.

12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

Have you ever noticed the important words, phrases and expressions that appear in the opening verse, **1 Peter 1:1**?

Notice the words elect, grace, peace in **verse 2**; mercy in **verse 3**; inheritance, heaven in **verse 4**; faith in **verse 5**; and gospel in **verse 12**.

Notice also the phrases “sanctification of the Spirit”, “the blood of Jesus” in **verse 2**, and “begotten” again in **verse 3**.

All of these might well be called identifying words of the gospel, for they are words and phrases unique to the Christian revelation.

There is one word, however, that Peter uses repeatedly - it is the word 'salvation'. Read **verses 5, 9 and 20**. Notice the theme of **verses 9-12**.

In this portion of scripture we have an outline of the meaning and method of God's great salvation.

GOD'S SALVATION IS HIS REVEALED METHOD OF SAVING MEN AND WOMEN.

The word 'revealed' in -

1 Peter 1:12 - *Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.*

actually means 'uncovered'. This reminds us of the difference between religion and revelation. It is important for us to learn the difference.

Religion consists of man's efforts to reach up to God and be accepted before Him. Religion begins on earth's level and in the heart and mind of man.

Revelation, on the other hand, is God's system or plan of saving men and women. It is conceived in His heart, and revealed to man.

Every system of salvation in the world, apart from Christianity, is man's religion. Christianity is God's revelation.

This is a great claim to make, for it means that Christianity alone is the only true way of salvation. Jesus Christ is the one and only Saviour -

Genesis 3:15 - *And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

and in prophecy, over and over again, and here in **verse 12**, and in many types and histories of the Old Testament.

Romans 1:16-18 - *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. 17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written,*

The just shall live by faith.

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

GOD'S SALVATION IS THE SALVATION OF THE SOUL.

We read this in **verse 9**. It is so important to remember that our deepest need is in the realm of the soul. Our bodies will waste and die, but not our souls. What profit would it be to have a saved life but a lost soul?

Mark 8:36-37 - *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*

37 Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

By nature, our souls are lost - lost to God, Heaven, righteousness, purity - eternally lost; lost because of sin.

Ezekiel 18:4 - *Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.*

Romans 6:23 - *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

God's salvation saves us from sin, death, hell and saves us for eternity. But this raises a question: Does God only offer to save the soul? Does He not offer help for body and mind? Yes, indeed He offers salvation from fear, worry and doubt, and gives us now the prospect of a new body.

2 Corinthians 5:1-4 - *For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven:

3 If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.

4 For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

GOD'S SALVATION IS ALTOGETHER OF GRACE.

Notice the important word 'grace' in **verse 10**. What do we mean when say that salvation is altogether of grace? We mean it is altogether of God's providing. We do not deserve it. We can do nothing to merit it. We can only accept it as a gift.

Every other religion in the world is a system of salvation by works, by merit. But, God's method of saving men and women excludes works altogether. Compare -

Romans 3:20 - *Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*

Ephesians 2:8-10 - *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:*

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Titus 3:5 - *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;*

then read **Romans 4:5** - *But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*

GOD'S SALVATION IS MADE AVAILABLE THROUGH CHRIST ALONE.

This is what **verse 11** tells us. Christ is the only Saviour. Why? Because He alone 'suffered'. In other words, He alone died to atone for our sin. When you talk about salvation, the first thing to settle is the terms upon which God will accept and save men and women. What are the terms?

He will only save us through the merit of the shed blood of Christ. Peter emphasizes this very clearly.

1 Peter 1:18-20 - *Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;*

19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

20 Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,

1 Peter 2:24 - *Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.*

1 Peter 3:18 - *For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:*

It is because the Lord Jesus alone has died to atone for our sin, that He alone can save us.

*'Nothing can for sin atone -
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!
Naught of good that I have done -
Nothing but the blood of Jesus'.*

5. GOD'S SALVATION IS DIVINELY WROUGHT IN THE HEART OF THE SINNER.

So says **verse 12**, where Peter tells the Christians that:

that they are saved.

b. they are saved because the gospel, God's way of salvation, was preached to them.

3. they are saved because it was preached in the power of the Holy Ghost.

In other words, when God's plan of salvation is faithfully proclaimed, the Holy Spirit witnesses to it and saves those who hear and believe. We have an illustration of this in

Acts 10:44 - *While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.*

We are saved when, hearing the Word of God, the Holy Spirit imparts faith and conveys the saving grace of the Lord to us.

John 3:8 - *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*

But what is man's part in salvation?

What is the condition we must fulfill?

6. GOD'S SALVATION IS RECEIVED BY FAITH.

Peter tells us this in **verse 9**. This is the only human condition of salvation that is mentioned in the Bible -

believing, or as -

John 1:12 - *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:*

shows us, receiving.

Compare -

John 3:16 - *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

John 5:24 - *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.*

Acts 13:38-39 - *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:
39 And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.*

Romans 1:16 - *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*

We are not saved by works, but simply by faith. We are not saved by believing plus something else, but simply by believing. The 'confession' that is made in -

Romans 10:9-10 - *That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.
10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

is the evidence of believing.

The 'baptism' that is mentioned in -

Mark 16:16 - *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*

is the open confession of an inward belief.

We are not saved by church-going, attending Communion, by religious observances or by reading the Bible.

All these come after we are saved, and are the result of our salvation. But, they cannot in any way contribute towards our salvation. This is clearly brought out in our last heading.

7. GOD'S SALVATION IS SEEN IN A COMPLETE CHANGE OF LIFE.

Peter is careful to emphasize this fact in -

1 Peter 1:13-16 - *Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;
14 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:
15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;
16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.*

We have many illustrations of this truth in the New Testament. Compare -

Ephesians 2:8-9 - *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:
9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

Ephesians 2:10 - *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

When the jailer was converted, he washed the wounds of Paul and Silas. This was the evidence of his salvation.

Acts 16:30-34 - *And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?
31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.
32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.
33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.
34 And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.*

When Lydia received the Lord as her Saviour and trusted Him for salvation, she opened her house to the Lord's servants. This was the evidence of a real work of grace in her heart.

Acts 16:14-15 - *And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.*

15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

Acts 16:40 - *And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.*

In 1 Peter 1:12 - *Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.*

the writer tells us that 'the angels desire to look into' this salvation. They bend down to look into it. They are amazed at the wonders of God's great plan for saving men and women.

*'O, how unlike the complex works of men
Heaven's easy, artless, unencumbered plan!'*

THE GUARANTEE OF GOD'S KEEPING POWER

STUDY 3

Scripture Portion: 1 Peter 1:1-12

Key Verse: 1 Peter 1:5

1 Peter 1:5 - *Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

There is surely no more comforting truth in the whole Bible than that God guarantees to keep His children from the present moment of time until they arrive safely in Heaven. How comforting this is -

to the new convert -

Jude 24 - *Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,*

to those in middle life -

2 Timothy 1:12 - *For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*

and to those nearing the journey's end -

2 Timothy 4:18 - *And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

There was one special petition that our Lord Jesus offered in His great intercessory prayer.

John 17:15 - *I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.*

Peter gives the same emphasis to this glorious truth in -

1 Peter 1:5 - *Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

It is important, of course, to study the setting and context of the words, and to see what **verses 2-4** say in introducing **verse 5**.

1 Peter 1:2-5 - *Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through*

sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

They tell us that, as believers, we are elect, sanctified, cleansed, born again and bound for Heaven! The Lord is not only keeping Heaven for us, but He is keeping us for Heaven.

So His keeping power operates on both sides of the veil. If we belong to the Lord, Heaven is certain.

John 10:28 - *And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*

Philippians 1:6 - *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:*

Hebrews 13:5-6 - *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

6 So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

Compare with -

Colossians 3:3 - *For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.*

But what about all the intervening days, months, and, perhaps, years before we actually get to Heaven? How can we be kept by the power of God day by day?

Notice the following three truths.

THE POWER BY WHICH GOD KEEPS US IS DESCRIBED AS 'THE POWER OF GOD'.

The Greek here is very significant for it literally reads 'kept in the power of God'. It is a military metaphor and the thought is of a garrison guarded by soldiers.

2 Corinthians 11:32 - *In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me:*

See, then, what a tremendous power is available to keep us all along our earthly pathway. It is nothing less than 'the power of God'.

Think of His power in creation, in history, in providence, in redemption and in His final intention. Surely the same God of power can keep you? His power is absolutely sufficient. He guarantees to make it available to you and operative in your life until the end of your earthly pilgrimage, when you will no longer need to be 'kept by the power of God through faith', for then, faith will be lost in sight.

2. THE EXTENT TO WHICH GOD KEEPS US COVERS EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE OF OUR EARTHLY LIFE.

How, in fact, do we need to be kept by the power of God? Here are some suggestions.

We need to be kept from the power of the flesh within.

We need to be kept from indwelling sin, for we still possess the old Adamic nature. This nature is unchanged, powerful and very assertive.

Romans 8:2 - *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*

We need to be kept from the power of the world without.

We are in danger of being allured by its attractions and its evil.

1 John 2:15-17 - *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

c. We need to be kept from the power of the devil around us.

He is a powerful foe and always seeking our downfall.

Sometimes he comes as an angel.

2 Corinthians 11:14 - *And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.*

Sometimes he comes as a roaring lion.

1 Peter 5:8 - *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:*

4. Our mind needs to be kept in peace.

Our mind needs fortifying and freeing from doubt, despair, depression, discouragement.

Isaiah 26:3 - *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.*

5. Our heart needs to be kept.

It needs to be kept free from fear -

Isaiah 41:10 - *Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.*

from worry -

Philippians 4:7 - *And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

and from anxiety -

Psalms 37:1 - *Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.*

f. Our will needs keeping.

It is powerless to do the thing that pleases God unless the Lord takes control of it.

Philippians 2:13 - *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

7. Our whole spirit, soul and body need to experience the keeping power of God.

Our personality needs to be kept.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 - *And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

These are the ways in which we need keeping and in which God offers to keep us. But how can we experience His keeping power? Suppose we are tempted to lie, to think unclean thoughts or succumb to doubt or despair - how can we experience and enjoy the keeping power of God at such times?

3. THE CHANNEL THROUGH WHICH GOD KEEPS US IS THAT OF OUR FAITH IN HIM.

As Peter says, we are ‘kept by the power of God through faith.....’. We are ‘guarded by the power of God operating through our faith’. In every experience of life, God offers us His keeping power. Faith receives this, and, as we receive, so we are kept. All we have to do is to trust Him, to receive what He offers and to lean on Him.

The Lord says, “Trust in Me, and I’ll keep you. As you trust, I’ll support and sustain you. When tempted to sin, to fear or to despair, just look to Me and trust in Me, and you will be ‘kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation’.”

*Trusting as the moments fly,
Trusting as the days go by,
Trusting Him, what'er befall,
Trusting Jesus, that is all.*

Now, here is one final question: How does the Lord keep us when we put our trust in Him? He keeps us in two ways.

1. By the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit within.

Every Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who is not only with the Christian, but is actually inside the Christian. He is there to keep the Christian in every situation of temptation, testing and trial, and to give deliverance from everything that is contrary to the will of God.

John 14:16-17 - *And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;
17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.*

Romans 5:18 - *Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.*

1 Corinthians 6:19 - *What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?*

But the Lord also keeps us -

2. By the angels without.

This is a wonderful truth that many Christians do not appreciate, namely, that God's ministering spirits have been entrusted with the responsibility of watching over God's children.

Psalm 91:11-12 - *For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.*

12 They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

Hebrews 1:13-14 - *But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?*

14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

Thus, the Lord says, "I want to keep you. I guarantee to keep you. It is My purpose to keep you. Your part is simply to put your trust in Me. As you do this, you will be 'kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time'."

Now read -

Psalm 121 - *I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.*

2 My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.

3 He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.

4 Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

5 The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand.

6 The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.

7 The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.

8 The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.

and conclude this study by lifting up your heart in praise and thanksgiving to God in the words of -

Jude 24-25 - *Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,*

25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen.

*Kept by the power of God, Kept by the power of God,
Day by day, come what may - Kept by the power of God!*

SOME THINGS THAT GOD PUTS FIRST

STUDY 4

Scripture Portion: Matthew 6:25-34

Key Verse: Matthew 6:33

Matthew 6:33 - *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

In this study we are to consider some of the things that God puts first in order of importance. There is a certain excitement about 'first things'. Most of us remember our first day at school. Our parents probably remember the first time we walked or talked!

Can you remember the first time you saw your need of the Lord Jesus as your own personal Saviour?

Acts 16:30-31 - *And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? 31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*

The first time you prayed in public?

Acts 9:11 - *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*

The first time you gave your testimony, led a soul to Christ or preached a sermon?

John 1:41-42 - *He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. 42 And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.*

All these experiences came first in order of time.

In this study, however, we shall focus upon some things that should come first by our deliberate choice. Concerning these, God says, "Seek ye first....", for they are His priorities.

One of the biggest lessons we have to learn is that of discrimination.

Many things clamour for priority. We need to know how to assess their values in order that we do not give first place to secondary things.

For example, the soul is more important than the body.

Mark 8:36 - *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*

The things of eternity are of infinitely greater importance than the things of time.

2 Corinthians 4:18 - *While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

Hebrews 9:27 - *And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:*

Life itself is far more important than possessions.

Luke 12:15 - *And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*

Luke 12:21 - *So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*

Moral strength is far more important than physical strength.

Ephesians 6:10 - *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.*

Much of our trouble arises from the fact that we have reversed the order. Too often we are 'majoring in minor things and minoring in major things'. This is true nationally, religiously and individually. Where are we to find guidance in the matter of putting first things first? How are we to know what God would have us do in this matter? Here, as in every matter of faith and practice, the Word of God is our all-sufficient guide.

Study the following 'first things'.

The first and greatest commandment.

Matthew 22:36-38 - *Master, which is the great commandment in the law?*
37 *Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*
38 *This is the first and great commandment.*

b. Why we love Him.

1 John 4:19 - *We love him, because he first loved us.*

3. The prerequisite to discipleship.

Luke 14:28 - *For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and*

counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

Luke 14:31 - *Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?*

d. Where giving must begin.

2 Corinthians 8:5 - *And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.*

5. Where piety (consistent living) must begin.

1 Timothy 5:4 - *But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to show piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God.*

6. Where soul-winning must begin.

John 1:41 - *He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.*

g. Where judgment must begin.

1 Peter 4:17 - *For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?*

Turn to the **Gospel of Matthew** and notice the record of our Lord's five-fold law of priorities.

1. FIRST YOUR BROTHER, THEN YOUR GIFT.

Matthew 5:23-24 - *Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;
24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*

Read these verses carefully and notice how clear is the divine order - God's order.

The devil loves to sow seeds of discord in the ranks of the redeemed, but here the Lord tells us of the way of victory - the way that commands His immediate blessing.

To worship Him, to bring gifts to Him, or to enter into His service, are all in vain if we are failing to obey God's requirement in **Matthew 5:23-24**.

God's work is often paralyzed, His servants are frequently powerless, because of an

unwillingness to seek and secure the reconciliation that is commanded and that will alone glorify Him and release His blessing.

No Christian can be right with God if he is consciously wrong with his fellow-men. If the tides of God's blessing are dammed up in your life, is it because you need to 'first be reconciled.....'?

As you think of the matter at this moment, what is it that you.....remember - **verse 23**?

2. FIRST THE SPIRITUAL, THEN THE TEMPORAL.

Matthew 6:33 - *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

Here is a most wonderful promise. If we will put God's claims first and seek to do His will first, then we need have no anxiety about anything else for He will shower upon us His abundant provision, even in days of shortage.

Read -

Matthew 6:31-32 - *Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?*

32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

which precede this great law of priorities. Notice from **verse 33** that we are to seek first, not only justification (indicated by 'the kingdom of God'), but sanctification (indicated by 'His righteousness'). It is possible to be in the kingdom of God and yet not really seeking His righteousness; to be saved, but not going on with the Lord.

2 Peter 3:18 - *But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.*

In like manner it is possible to be justified and to disregard God's call to sanctification.

1 Thessalonians 4:3 - *For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:*

Thus we see that the promise of **Matthew 6:33** is made to the Christian who is willing to go all the way with the Lord.

God knows all about our temporal needs. He waits, wants and guarantees to meet those needs if we will put first things first.

Compare -

1 Kings 17:13-16 - *And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.*

14 For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.

15 And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.

16 And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.

Philippians 4:19 - *But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

3. FIRST JUDGE YOURSELF, THEN YOUR BROTHER.

Matthew 7:3-5 - *And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?*

4 Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

5 Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

For 'mote' in **verse 3**, read 'splinter', and for 'beam' read 'plank'. How blind we often are to our own faults. Yet how quickly we observe the faults and failings of others! Nearly every time we criticize someone else for a certain thing, we unconsciously criticize them for the thing of which we ourselves are guilty.

What solemn and searching words we read in -

Matthew 7:2 - *For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*

spoken by the Searcher of hearts Himself -

Jer. 17:10 - *I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.*

Be careful how you use your critical faculty.

Be sure to read -

Galatians 6:1 - *Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*

Notice the last part of the verse.

4. FIRST WHAT CHRIST WANTS, THEN WHAT YOU WANT.

Matthew 8:21-22 - *And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.*

22 *But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.*

‘Me first.....!’ How terrible and yet how frequently we act in this way! - a disciple, but a ‘me first’ disciple, a self-centered Christian going his own way instead of the Lord’s way. There is only one answer to each of the following seven questions.

1. Why do you allow that doubtful habit?
2. Why do you dress to attract attention?
- c. Why do you pursue that harmful friendship?
4. Why do you allow that crooked method in business?
- e. Why do you frequent questionable places of entertainment?
6. Why do you fail in winning souls?
- g. Why do you not obey the voice of the Lord?

The answer to every one of these questions is to be found in the words, ‘me first’.

5. FIRST THE INSIDE, THEN THE OUTSIDE.

Matthew 23:25-26 - *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.*
26 *Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.*

The Christian's life is not just an outwardly reformed life. It is primarily an inwardly cleansed life. Compare -

1 Samuel 16:7 - *But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.*

Psalm 51:6 - *Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.*

Psalm 51:10 - *Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.*

When the inward cleansing is thorough, the outward transformation is soon evident. God does not want outward profession merely. First He wants inward possession.

In concluding this study, get alone with the Lord and read -

2 Chronicles 29:15-17 - *And they gathered their brethren, and sanctified themselves, and came, according to the commandment of the king, by the words of the LORD, to cleanse the house of the LORD.*

16 And the priests went into the inner part of the house of the LORD, to cleanse it, and brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of the LORD into the court of the house of the LORD. And the Levites took it, to carry it out abroad into the brook Kidron.

17 Now they began on the first day of the first month to sanctify, and on the eighth day of the month came they to the porch of the LORD: so they sanctified the house of the LORD in eight days; and in the sixteenth day of the first month they made an end.

*Seek ye first, not earth's aspirings,
Ceaseless longings, vain desirings;
But your precious soul's requirings
Seek ye first.*

THE POWER OF PREVAILING PRAYER

STUDY 5

Scripture Portion: James 5:7-20

Key Verse: James 5:16

Here is a subject concerning which we can turn to almost any portion of the Word of God for material, for the Bible is packed full of promises, encouragements and illustrations that emphasize the power of prevailing prayer. As a point of departure, we shall base this study upon -

James 5:16-18 - *Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*

17 Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

It is said that James had knees that were worn hard by his constant habit of kneeling. If this is true, we have the testimony of a man who had proved the power of prayer in his own life, and practised what he preached. Notice that **James 5:16** speaks about a particular kind of prayer.....'the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much'.

Prayer that avails, prevails and gets results - do we know anything about this kind of prayer?

1. THE INFERENCE OF THESE WORDS IS THAT THERE IS A KIND, OR QUALITY, OF PRAYER THAT AVAILS LITTLE OR NOTHING.

This kind of prayer is ineffective and useless. God does not hear this prayer.

Job 27:8-9 - *For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?*

9 Will God hear his cry when trouble cometh upon him?

Job 35:13 - *Surely God will not hear vanity, neither will the Almighty regard it.*

Isaiah 1:15-16 - *And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.
16 Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil;*

Isaiah 59:2 - *But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.*

Micah 3:4 - *Then shall they cry unto the LORD, but he will not hear them: he will even hide his face from them at that time, as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings.*

Zechariah 7:11-13 - *But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear.*

12 Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts.

13 Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts:

Luke 18:10-14 - *Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.*

11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

How solemn is this truth! Consider the following kinds of prayer that avail little or nothing.

Prayer with a wrong motive cannot prevail.

James 4:3 - *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*

Often we pray selfishly, but only prayer that is offered for the glory of God gains His ear and secures His answer.

b. If sin is regarded, prayer cannot prevail.

Psalm 66:18 - *If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:*

If we knowingly harbour sin in our life, God will not hear us. We need to pray the prayer that David prayed.

Psalm 139:23-24 - *Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:*

24 And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

If God reveals sin, thank God we may confess it and have it forgiven.

1 John 1:9 - *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

3. An unforgiving spirit will hinder prayer.

See what our Lord had to say about this in -

Mark 11:25 - *And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.*

then read -

Mark 11:26 - *But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.*

Is this a possible reason why our prayers for the conversion of our loved ones are not being answered?

- d. An unwillingness to be reconciled to another hinders prayer.**

Matthew 5:23-24 - *Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;*

24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Here is a priority. It is of little use to pray, to worship, to go to meetings, or to engage in the service of God and to expect His blessing if we are not willing first to be reconciled to our brother.

5. A wrong human relationship hinders prayer.

Study the following scripture carefully.

1 Peter 3:7 - *Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.*

Perhaps our attitude to, or relationship with, the members of our family is not all it should be. According to this verse, this can be a hindrance to our prayers.

These are some of the ways in which our prayers may be hindered, but thank God, our

prayers may be heard and answered! This is the main emphasis that the Holy Spirit makes in -

James 5:16 - *Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*

2. THERE IS A PRAYER THAT IS ALWAYS EFFECTIVE.

It avails much. It succeeds and gains God's answer. James tells us this. If we ask James, "How much can prayer do"? All he can reply is, "Much!". He does go on to say, "I will give you an illustration of what prayer can do." This is in -

James 5:17-18 - *Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.*

18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

So, if we want to get an idea of the power of prevailing prayer, we would do well to look at Elijah and ask, "What can prayer do?"

6. Through prayer God's servants are empowered to speak His Word.

We read about this in -

1 Kings 17:1 - *And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.*

Surely it was because Elijah knew what it was to stand before the Lord that he was able to go and stand before the wicked Ahab.

1 Kings 18:17 - *And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?*

It was prayer in private that made him powerful in public.

When we turn to the New Testament, we find in the **Book of Acts** the very same thing.

Compare -

Acts 4:29 - *And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that*

with all boldness they may speak thy word,

Acts 4:31-32 - *And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.*

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

The mighty power of prayer releases the power of the Holy Spirit. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are made bold and courageous to speak for the Lord.

b. Through prayer God's servants gain ample provision for all their needs.

In **1 Kings 17** we are given two glorious illustrations of this.

First, God provided free accommodation for Elijah by the brook Cherith and fed him day by day by means of ravens.

1 Kings 17:2-6 - *And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,*

3 Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.

4 And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.

5 So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.

6 And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.

Second, the brook dried up -

1 Kings 17:7 - *And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.*

so God provided free accommodation at Zarephath, and His provision was all-sufficient.

1 Kings 17:8-16 - *And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,*

9 Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.

10 So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.

11 And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.

12 And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal

in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.

13 And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.

14 For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.

15 And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.

16 And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.

Compare with -

Psalm 34:10 - *The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing.*

3. Through prayer God's servants experience the miracle-working power of God.

1 Kings 17:17-24 - *And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him.*

18 And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?

19 And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed.

20 And he cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?

21 And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again.

22 And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.

23 And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth.

24 And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth.

Through prayer the dead can be raised, the sick can be healed, the lost can be saved.

Indeed, there is no limit to the miracles that God can perform when His people pray.

- d. Through prayer God's servants are victorious over the enemies of the Lord.*

The whole of **1 Kings, chapter 18**, is worth a very careful reading. How wonderful - the false prophets were put to shame, and afterwards put to death, and the Name of the Lord was gloriously vindicated!

Prayer today can drive back the powers of darkness and overcome God's enemies - the forces of materialism, the flood of bad literature, the desecration of holy things, the spread of false religion, etc.

Isaiah 59:19 - *So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him.*

5. Through prayer God's servants are kept safe, secure and steadfast in the time of testing, trouble and failure.

Please read the whole of **1 Kings, chapter 19**. How tenderly the Lord dealt with His weary and failing servant. How graciously the Divine Physician restored and re-commissioned him! All this came about through prayer.

3. IN CONCLUSION, NOTICE THE CONDITIONS OF PREVAILING PRAYER.

1. The prayer that prevails must be fervent, earnest and passionate.

A modern translation of **James 5:16** reads: '*Tremendous power is made available through a good man's earnest prayer.*' The emphasis is upon the word 'earnest'.

- b. The prayer that prevails is prayer that in inwrought by the Holy Spirit.*

Romans 8:26 - *Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*

Philippians 2:13 - *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

True prayer is the bringing of requests to God that have been wrought in us and born within us by the Holy Spirit.

3. The prayer that prevails must be the prayer of a righteous man.

All of us by nature are unrighteous.

Isaiah 64:6 - *But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.*

But, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ we have been made righteous.

The prayer that God hears is the prayer of one who is trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ as his righteousness and who is seeking to live righteously day by day.

KNOWING AND DOING THE WILL OF GOD

STUDY 6

Scripture Portion: Psalm 143:1-12

Key Verse: Psalm 143:10

This psalm is one of the penitential psalms. C. H. Spurgeon describes it as “a box of ointment composed of divers ingredients, sweet and bitter, pungent and precious”.

In this study we shall consider the heart-cry of the psalmist for grace to know and to do God’s will.

Psalm 143:10 - *Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness.*

There is only one thing that really matters in the life of the Christian. It is to know and to do the will of God. This being the case, how important is the theme of this study!

To know and to do God’s will was the supreme thing in the life of our Lord Himself.

Compare -

Psalm 40:7-8 - *Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, & I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.*

John 4:34 - *Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.*

John 17:4 - *I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.*

Matthew 26:39 - *And he went a little farther, 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.*

What does this six-word prayer of David teach us?

IT STATES THE FIRST HEART-CRY AND LONGING OF THE TRULY BORN AGAIN SOUL.

Before we become Christians, we are not really interested in God's will.

We are only interested in our own will and in going our own way.

Isaiah 53:6 - *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

But what happens when God, in His mercy, steps into our life? At once we find ourselves praying the prayer of David - "*Teach me to do Thy will*". For an illustration of this, read -

Acts 9:1-6 - *And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,
2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.
3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:
4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?
5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.
6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.*

Especially notice **verse 6**.

One of the marks of a truly born again soul is the desire to know and to do God's will.

2. IT DECLARES THE FACT THAT GOD HAS A WILL, A PLAN, FOR THE LIFE OF EACH OF HIS CHILDREN.

This great truth is declared throughout the Bible and is proved in the experience of God's people. Take the **Book of Psalms**, for instance.

How often the psalmist prays to know God's will in order that he might please God!

Compare -

Colossians 1:9 - *For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;*

Colossians 4:12 - *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.*

Christian biography also confirms the glorious truth that the Lord has a plan for the life of each one of His children. Anyone who has read the biographies of John Wesley, R. B. Meyer or Billy Graham will surely have recognized this truth.

This means that the Lord has a plan for your life.

4. IT AFFIRMS THAT GOD IS READY AND WILLING TO REVEAL HIS WILL TO HIS CHILDREN.

People often ask the question: How can we know God's will? The answer is that God is always far more willing to guide us than we are to be guided. He wants the very best for us, not the second-best.

We need to distinguish between the *directive* and the *permissive* will of God. By His *directive will* we mean that which is His highest and most gracious purpose. By His *permissive will* we mean that which He may allow and yet not really approve.

Often He permits that which He does not desire or commend. I may have God's highest will for my life. This, and this alone, will be life's highest purpose and its greatest usefulness.

On the other hand, I may make my own plans and insist on my own choice. He may allow me to do this, and even grant me some measure of blessing. But it will be a most serious mistake. Read the solemn words in -

Psalm 106:15 - *And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.*

This leads us to the question: What are the conditions of knowing and doing God's perfect will.

How may we know His perfect plan for our life? Does David's prayer give us any clues?

4. IT INDICATES THE CONDITIONS THAT MUST BE MET IF WE ARE TO KNOW AND TO DO GOD'S

PERFECT WILL.

There must be a teachable attitude.

This is indicated by David's request, "Teach me....." It speaks of a childlike spirit. It tells us that David acknowledged his need to be taught.

Compare -

Jeremiah 10:23 - *O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.*

Matthew 18:3 - *And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

There must be an intense desire to know God's will.

This also is indicated by David's prayer. It was because he longed to know and to do God's will that he cried out, "Teach me to do Thy will". The Bible is full of specific promises to stimulate our desire in this direction.

Compare -

Psalms 37:5 - *Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.*

Proverbs 3:6 - *In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*

Proverbs 16:3 - *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

James 1:5 - *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*

There must be a willingness to do His will, whatever it involves.

Notice that David prayed, "Teach me to do Thy will" - not simply, "Teach me to know Thy will".

He was prepared to do the will of God, whether it was easy or hard, pleasing or painful, and whether it was harmonious with what he wanted or otherwise.

John 7:17 - *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*

These are three simple conditions that must be met if we are going to seek to know and to do God's will.

But notice one further thing about this prayer.

5. IT PROVOKES THE QUESTION: HOW DOES THE LORD TEACH US TO DO HIS WILL?

He does it in three ways:

4. By the teaching of His Word.

In the Bible, we have God's will revealed in general terms and in clearly stated principles. For example, will it glorify God? Will it honour the Holy Spirit? Does it conflict with any clear command? These clear principles give us definite guidance concerning a great many matters.

There are matters, however, about which the Bible does not have any specific word for us. Suppose we are in doubt as to whether we should go on a certain journey or buy a certain house. How can we be sure of our guidance about matters like this?

We can be sure because God guides us not only the teaching of His Word, but also:

b. By the promptings of His Spirit.

This is very wonderful!

Romans 8:14 - *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

Compare -

Psalm 143:8 - *Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee.*

Psalm 143:10-11 - *Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness.*

11 Quicken me, O LORD, for thy name's sake: for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble.

Particularly notice the words, “Cause me to know the way where I should walk.....Thy Spirit is good.....Quicken me, O Lord.....”.

When there is no specific principle by which we may discover guidance, God graciously intervenes and guides us by the prompting of the Holy Spirit Who dwells within the heart of every believer.

1 Corinthians 6:19 - *What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?*

Thus, we have the Guide Himself within.

But the Lord also guides us:

3. By the overruling of His providence.

He guides us through what we call the circumstances of life. He opens and closes doors.

Revelation 3:8 - *I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.*

He hedges up our way so that we cannot do the thing that we planned to do. He causes our thoughts to change to be in harmony with His own thoughts.

Proverbs 16:3 - *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

These are the three ways in which the Lord enables His children to ascertain His will. It is important to notice, however, that to be sure of knowing the will of God, these three must agree. They must harmonize. They must all say to us, “This is the way; walk ye in it!”

Isaiah 30:21 - *And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.*

What a wonderful thing it is to have a longing in our hearts to know and to do the will of God! Have you that longing? Is David’s prayer your prayer, “Teach me to do Thy will”?

1 John 2:17 - *And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*

HOW TO ENJOY THE BIBLE

STUDY 7

Scripture Portion: Jeremiah 15:15-21

Key Verse: Jeremiah 15:16

Jeremiah 15:16 - *Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts.*

The prophet Jeremiah's joy in discovering the Word of God, in receiving it and making it his own, was unbounded, as he tells us in **Jeremiah 15:16**. If we are to live for the Lord and serve Him successfully, we must give the Bible its rightful place in our life.

It is not enough to believe the Bible, for it is possible to believe it and yet neglect it. Neither is it enough to read and study it out of a sense of duty. The essential thing is that we enjoy it and delight in those flashes of illumination which the Lord gives us as we dwell deeply in the pages of His book.

What immense benefits there are for those who delight themselves in God's Word! What are those benefits? Look up the following scriptures.

Joshua 1:8 - *This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.*

Deuteronomy 11:18-21 - *Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes.*

19 And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

20 And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates:

21 That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth.

Psalms 1:1-3 - *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.*

2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

Psalms 19:11 - *Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.*

Psalms 119

2 Timothy 3:15-17 - *And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

How may we really enjoy our reading and studying of God's Word? Here are some practical suggestions.

IF WE ARE TO ENJOY THE BIBLE WE MUST KNOW AND LOVE THE ONE WHOM IT SUPREMEY REVEALS AND WHO FILLS ITS PAGES.

When we read the written Word, we come to know the Incarnate Word.

John 1:1 - *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

2 The same was in the beginning with God.

John 1:14 - *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

When we come to KNOW Him, He leads us back to the written Word.

Luke 24:27 - *And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.*

We cannot think of the one without the other.

The Bible can be enjoyed as literature. But, in order to enjoy it in its fullest sense, we must know *Him* whom to know is life eternal.

John 17:3 - *And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*

Compare -

Luke 24:32 - *And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?*

Jeremiah 15:16 - *Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts.*

Notice that it is the 'burning heart' that makes Bible study such a thrilling experience.

IF WE ARE TO ENJOY THE BIBLE WE MUST ACCEPT IT AS IT STANDS AND APPRECIATE SOMETHING OF ITS UNIQUE NATURE.

This is no ordinary book. It is God's Word, fully and wholly inspired from Genesis to Revelation. It is therefore entirely accurate and absolutely authoritative. If we entertain doubts about the Word of God we shall not really enjoy it or have the same thirst for it.

2 Timothy 3:16 - *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:*

2 Peter 1:21 - *For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*

What joy it brings us when we accept the whole Bible as the inspired Word of God. How illogical it is not to accept the whole Bible as God's Word when we have so many evidences that it is His Word!

3. IF WE ARE TO ENJOY THE BIBLE WE MUST NOT BE TOO TROUBLED ABOUT THOSE PORTIONS WHICH ARE HARD TO UNDERSTAND.

Of course, if this book comes to us from the Infinite God, we, whose minds are finite, will not be able to understand many of its mysteries. If we could understand the whole Bible then surely we would question its divine origin!

Do not be disturbed about the so-called 'discrepancies' of which you are told. There are very many things 'hard to be understood'.

2 Peter 3:16 - *As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.*

In these uncertain days in which we are living, there is a tremendous joy and satisfaction in being able to turn to a book where, again and again, we hear the words, 'Thus saith the Lord.....'.

Matthew 11:25 - *At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.*

Because He has spoken, we believe what He has said. As we seek the help of the Holy Spirit, problems disappear, light is given and His truth shines out.

6. IF WE ARE TO ENJOY THE BIBLE WE MUST REALLY READ IT, STUDY IT, SEARCH IT, MARK IT AND MEDITATE UPON ITS TRUTHS. WE MUST DO THIS REGULARLY, REVERENTLY, PERSEVERINGLY AND METHODICALLY.

Yes, we must read, read and read again.

Song of Solomon 5:1 - *I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.*

We must study it seriously and exhaustively.

2 Timothy 2:15 - *Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

We must search it.

John 5:39 - *Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.*

We must compare scripture with scripture.

Acts 17:11 - *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*

We must meditate upon it.

Psalms 1:2 - *But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*

We must do all this regularly, like the Bereans -

Acts 17:11 - *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*

reverently -

Heb. 4:12 - *For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

perseveringly -

Psalm 1:2 - *But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*

and methodically.

Read your Bible every day with the help of some Bible reading notes. Study it in different ways:

- (1) *by books.*
- (2) *by topics.*
- (3) *by doctrines.*
- (4) *by chapters.*
- (5) *by verses.*
- (6) *by characters.*
- (7) *by words.*

Try to secure a good quality Bible and do not be afraid to mark it. And also obtain a concordance and (if possible) a Bible dictionary. Mark down your findings in a notebook.

7. IF WE ARE TO ENJOY THE BIBLE WE MUST UNDERSTAND SOMETHING OF ITS FORMATION AND ITS STRUCTURE. WE MUST BECOME THOROUGHLY FAMILIAR WITH ITS MAIN CONTENTS.

In the Bible, there are 66 books, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. These consist of history, typology, narrative, poetry and prophecies in the Old Testament and the Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Revelation in the New Testament. Become so familiar with the Bible that you can find your way about it. Go through it and mark out the great chapters - e.g. -

Genesis 3 - the Fall.

Genesis 6 - the Flood.

Exodus 3 - The call of Moses.

Exodus 12 - The Passover; and so on.

6. IF WE ARE TO ENJOY THE BIBLE WE MUST BE WILLING TO LIVE DAY BY DAY IN THE LIGHT OF ITS TEACHING.

‘This Book will keep me from sin. Sin will keep me from this Book’.

If after reading God’s Word, we do not obey its teachings, we shall certainly shrink from reading the Book again. We shall not enjoy it.

James 1:18-21 - *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

To enjoy it, we must obey its precepts.

James 4:3 - *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*

We should study it in the attitude of -

Acts 9:6 - *And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.*

John 2:5 - *His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.*

7. IF WE ARE TO ENJOY THE BIBLE WE MUST ALWAYS RELY UPON THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOK, TO INTERPRET ITS TRUTH TO US, AND, ABOVE ALL, TO REVEAL THE LORD JESUS TO US.

How wonderful it is that, as we study this Book, the Author is with us to open our eyes to 'behold wondrous things' as He reveals them!

Psalm 119:18 - *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.*

Joshua 1:18 - *Whosoever he be that doth rebel against thy commandment, and will not hearken unto thy words in all that thou commandest him, he shall be put to death: only be strong and of a good courage.*

*Who can tell the pleasure,
Who recount the treasure,
By Thy Word imparted
To the simple-hearted?*

THE REAL MEANING OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

STUDY 8

Scripture Portion: Philippians 1:1-20

Key Verse: Philippians 1:5

Philippians 1:5 - *For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now;*

Whenever the apostle Paul thought of the Christians at Philippi, he thanked God for their 'fellowship in the gospel'. Thus it refers to something that belongs to us all, that we share together. In this case it is something distinctively connected with the gospel.

Every Christian should be enjoying and expressing fellowship in the gospel. How are we as Christians to enjoy this fellowship?

FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL EXPRESSES ITSELF IN THANKSGIVING.

Paul tells us this in -

Philippians 1:3 - *I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,*

This was a very remarkable thing for him to say! When he thought of the Philippian Christians, he thanked God for every one of them. That is real fellowship in the gospel, to be thankful for all God's people. It was easy for him to thank God for Lydia.

Acts 16:14-15 - *And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.*

15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

Acts 16:40 - *And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.*

and for the jailer -

Acts 16:25-34 - *And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.*

26 And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.

27 *And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.*

28 *But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.*

29 *Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,*

30 *And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*

31 *And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*

32 *And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.*

33 *And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.*

34 *And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.*

But it was certainly not so easy for him to thank God for Euodias and Syntyche.

Philippians 4:2 - *I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.*

Yet, the apostle thanked God for them all. This aspect of fellowship in the gospel is very important indeed.

One of the great benefits of being thankful for all those with whom we are associated in Christian worship and service is that it saves us from wrong attitudes: irritation, resentment, jealousy - these horrible sins of the spirit. We cannot thank God for our brother and at the same time be jealous of him. Put it to the test and see!

2. FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL EXPRESSES ITSELF IN PRAYER.

This is brought before us in -

Philippians 1:4 - *Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy,*

Notice how important all the words are in this verse. What a prayer list Paul had! But it is the privilege of every Christian to enjoy this immense privilege of praying for others.

Before we were Christians it did not make sense to us to pray for our friends and associates, but now we know that when we pray for each other, we are enjoying and expressing fellowship in the gospel.

Such Christian fellowship wonderfully purifies the atmosphere of any church. It is not possible to be critical or a hinderer in the work of the Lord if we are fully engaged in this ministry of prayer.

Notice what Paul prayed for the Christians at Philippi.

Philippians 1:9-11 - *And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment;*

10 That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;

11 Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

What people we would be if we prayed like this for each other!

3. FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL EXPRESSES ITSELF IN FAITH.

Philippians 1:6 - *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:*

tells us that Paul had faith, confidence, in these Christians, in God's purpose for these Christians in what He was doing in them, and was going to do in and for them in the days to come.

It is very easy for us to lose faith in human nature, even to lose faith in other Christians and in ourselves.

Was Paul ever tempted in this way? Doubtless he was. He had no confidence in himself and no confidence in human nature, but, he had great confidence in what God was doing and in what God was going to do.

We have a beautiful illustration of this in the Lord's call to Simon Peter.

John 1:42 - *And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.*

He knew all about Simon, about his nature, temperament and weakness.

But, He also knew about the good work He was going to do in him, and the kind of man Simon would be when this work was complete.

Now, read **verse 6** again.

4. FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL EXPRESSES ITSELF IN LOVE.

This is brought before us in -

Philippians 1:7-8 - *Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you*

in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.

8 For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.

Notice that Paul said of these Christians that he had them in his heart - not simply in his head, on his lips or (as the late Canon Guy King used to say) 'on his nerves'!

Paul longed for his brothers and sisters at Philippi, even for Euodias and Syntyche.

We sometimes lack this important aspect and expression of Christian fellowship in the gospel, for, often we are hard and sometimes even cruel.

Take to heart -

John 13:34-35 - *A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.*

35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Notice that the important word in **verse 35** is the word 'have'. Do we enjoy and express fellowship in the gospel by our love - not only for the Lord and for those whom we find it easy to love, but for God's people everywhere, and for those who are not the children of God and are lost and so much in need of our love?

Please read the following extract from -

1 Corinthians 13:1-8 (J.B.Philips translation) -

- 1. If I speak with the eloquence of men and of angels, but have no love, I become no more than blaring brass or crashing cymbals.*
- 2. If I have the gift of foretelling the future and hold in my mind, not only all human knowledge, but the very secrets of God, and if I also have that absolute faith which can move mountains, but have no love, I amount to nothing at all.*
- 3. If I dispose of all that I possess, yes, even if I give my own body to be burned, but have no love, I achieve precisely nothing.*
- 4. This love of which I speak is slow to lose patience - it looks for a way of being constructive. It is not possessive. It is neither anxious to impress nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance.*
- 5. Love has good manners and does not pursue selfish advantage. It is not touchy.*
- 6. It does not keep account of evil or gloat over the wickedness of other people. On the other hand, it is glad with all good men when truth prevails.*
- 7. Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything.*
- 8. It is, in fact, the one thing that still stands when all else has fallen.*

5. FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL EXPRESSES ITSELF IN MINISTRY.

What is the ministry to which every Christian is called? It is 'the furtherance of the gospel' mentioned in -

Philippians 1:12 - *But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel;*

The gospel is furthered in two ways: **first** - by life, and **second** - by lip.

Both are mentioned here.

4. The gospel is furthered when Christians live the Christian life consistently.

In other words, we further the gospel by what we are.

That is what the apostle says in -

Philippians 1:12 - *But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel;*

Philippians 1:20 - *According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.*

Paul was tested and tried, yet the gospel was being furthered because, in the midst of his testing and trial, his reaction glorified God.

Christ was magnified in his body. But, notice this:

5. The gospel is also furthered by the spoken testimony of Christians.

In other words, we further the gospel by what we say.

Notice the words 'speak' and 'preach' in -

Philippians 1:14-16 - *And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.*

15 Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will:

16 The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds:

Philippians 1:18 - *What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.*

We enjoy and express fellowship in the gospel when we testify to others of the Lord's saving grace.

Fellowship in the gospel is something that every Christian should be enjoying and expressing. These are the five ways in which we should do it. But how is it possible to share and show this fellowship in the gospel? The answer is in -

Philippians 1:19 - *For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,*

It is only possible by 'the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ'.

GOD'S PLAN FOR WORLD EVANGELIZATION

STUDY 9

Scripture Portions: Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-20

Key Verse: Mark 16:15

Every Christian ought to be thoroughly familiar with the great missionary command that runs through both the Old and New Testaments - a command that clearly outlines God's plan for world evangelization. Basing our study on -

Mark 16:15 - *And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.*

it is important to notice that:

- (1) *these words were spoken by our Lord Himself and constitute the divine plan for getting the gospel out to every creature.*
- (2) *this was His parting command to His followers.*
- (3) *it related to the present dispensation of grace in which we are living.*
- (4) *it is, therefore, just as binding upon us today as it was upon the first Christians.*

But - how slow God's people have been to obey this command! Indeed, generations of souls have lived and died without every hearing the gospel because Christians have failed to take the gospel to them.

We need the vision of 'all the world.....' and '.....every creature', and of our responsibility to do something to bring the gospel to the millions for whom Christ died.

Thus, our Lord's command to every Christian is to engage in a program of world evangelism.

We are not to civilize the world, primarily, or to confine ourselves to a program of education or social betterment. All these will follow if we preach the gospel, the good news.

Romans 1:16 - *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*

1 Corinthians 15:1-3 - *Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I*

preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;

2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

THE PLAN FOR PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREATURE IS THE LORD'S.

God's love extends to the whole of mankind.

John 3:16 - *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

The Lord came for 'all people'.

Luke 2:10 - *And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.*

The gospel is to 'whosoever' -

Romans 10:12-13 - *For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.*

13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

The Lord Jesus died for 'the world'.

1 John 1:29 - *The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*

1 John 2:2 - *And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*

Study the following statement carefully.

'The Church of every generation is commissioned by Christ to evangelize the world in its generation. To evangelize the world is to present Christ as the only Saviour and divine Lord, that every human being will have a fair opportunity intelligently to accept or reject Him.'

God's appeal to mankind is still an appeal to 'all the world'.

Isaiah 45:22 - *Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.*

2. THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREATURE IS UPON EVERY CHRISTIAN.

The marching orders of -

Mark 16:15 - *And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.*

are just as binding upon every Christian today as they were at first upon the apostles.

See what Paul says about it in -

2 Corinthians 5:19 - *To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.*

Romans 10:13-17 - *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. 14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?*

15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?

17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Immediately we are born into God's family, we are responsible for taking our share in the evangelization of the world. Are you discharging your responsibility? Are you obeying **Mark 16:15**?

6. THE NEED FOR PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREATURE IS VERY GREAT.

It was great when our Lord initiated this wonderful program. At that time there was only a handful of Christians. But the need is far greater today for the world population is so much greater. There are more people who need to hear the gospel and be saved.

In addition to this, there are very many more religions and false cults in the world today than there were 1900 years ago.

2 Corinthians 4:4 - *In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them*

which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

But there is still only one gospel -

Galatians 1:6-9 - *I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:*

7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

and only one Saviour -

John 14:6 - *Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

Acts 4:12 - *Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*

There are millions of people in the world today who have never heard of Christ! There are many more, even in Britain, who have never been clearly told the way of salvation, yet how much greater is the need in heathen lands, amid the darkness of superstition, fear and degradation!

7. THE PERIOD FOR PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREATURE IS LIMITED.

The Lord Jesus once said -

John 4:35 - *Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.*

He also said -

John 9:4 - *I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.*

The time is short -

1 Corinthians 7:29 - *But this I say, brethren, the time is short:.....*

It is short dispensationally -

James 5:8 - *Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*

It is short politically, for doors of opportunity for missionary enterprise are fast closing in many lands.

It is short spiritually, for hundreds of thousands of souls die daily without a knowledge of the Lord.

Ephesians 2:12 - *That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:*

How urgent is the need for preaching the gospel throughout the whole world!

5. THE METHODS FOR PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREATURE ARE VARIED.

With the increase of literacy, the rapid advent of radio and the speed of air travel, evangelism is a much speedier business than when the first disciples began the task.

There are three methods by which God's people can discharge their missionary responsibilities.

The first way is by PRAYER.

Matthew 9:36-38 - *But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. 37 Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few;*

38 Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

We are told that only 'the Lord of the Harvest' can call labourers out into His harvest fields.

But - we must pray them out.

b. The second way is by GIVING.

Every Christian should regularly, systematically and sacrificially give of his substance so that the work of foreign missions may be sustained and extended.

Acts 11:27-30 - *And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.*

28 *And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.*

29 *Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea:*

30 *Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.*

3. The third way is by being willing to GO YOURSELF.

All cannot go in person. If you are under the age of 25, if you love the Lord Jesus, perhaps you can go.

You should be willing to go if He calls you. Have you told Him of your willingness?

Isaiah 6:8 - *Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.*

6. THE REWARD FOR PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREATURE IS VERY GREAT.

The immediate reward is the special consciousness of the presence of the Lord Jesus -

Matthew 28:19-20 - *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:*

20 *Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

and the joy of soul-winning -

Psalms 126:6 - *He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.*

There are also future rewards -

Daniel 12:3 - *And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.*

Compare the following scriptures -

Matthew 16:25 - *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.*

Matthew 19:29 - *And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.*

7. THE EQUIPMENT FOR PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREATURE IS PROMISED.

The power of the Holy Ghost is the one essential enabling for all missionary enterprise.

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

Are you willing to BE what the Lord wants you to be; to DO what He wants you to do; and to GO where He wants you to go, cost what it may, by His grace?

If so, will you tell Him SO?

*The Master comes! He calls for thee -
Go forth at His almighty word;
Obedient to His last command
And tell to those who never heard;
Who sit in deepest shade of night,
That Christ has come to give them light!*

THE KIND OF PEOPLE WE OUGHT TO BE

STUDY 10

Scripture Portion: 2 Peter 3:1-18

Key Verse: 2 Peter 3:11

2 Peter 3:11 - *Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,*

Jesus is coming again!

In this study we shall notice that belief in the truth of the second coming of our Lord is urged in the New Testament as a present incentive to holiness of life and whole-heartedness in service.

If we believe Christ is coming again, this belief must affect our behaviour.

Look up the following scriptures. Notice the truth of our Lord's return is linked with the question of conduct and service.

Luke 12:43 - *Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.*

1 Corinthians 4:5 - *Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.*

Philippians 1:10 - *That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;*

Colossians 3:2-5 - *Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.*

3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

4 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:

2 Timothy 4:1-2 - *I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;*

2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

Titus 2:11-13 - *For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, 12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; 13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;*

James 5:7-8 - *Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. 8 Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*

1 John 2:28 - *And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.*

1 John 3:2 - *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*

Now notice the argument the apostle uses in -

2 Peter 3:11 - *Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,*

Study the following comments by that old-time expositor, Albert Barnes, who wrote:

'The fact of the imminent return of Christ ought to be allowed to exert a deep and abiding influence on us, to induce us to lead holy lives.

'We should feel that there is nothing permanent on this earth; that this is not our abiding home, and that our great interests are in another world.

'We should be serious, humble and prayerful, and should make it our great object to be prepared for the solemn scenes through which we are soon to pass.

'An habitual contemplation of the truth that all we see is soon to pass away would produce a most salutary effect on the mind. It would make us serious. It would lead us not to desire to accumulate what must so soon be destroyed.

'It would prompt us to lay up our treasures in Heaven. It would cause us to ask, with deep earnestness, whether we are prepared for these amazing scenes should they suddenly burst upon us.'

In **2 Peter**, there are five characteristics of the Christian in whose life the truth of Christ's return is a practical hope.

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1. IF WE BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS COMING AGAIN SOON, WE SHALL SEEK TO LIVE LIVES THAT ARE CHRIST-LIKE, HOLY, BLAMELESS, AND GOD-GLORIFYING.
-

Study - **2 Peter 3:11** - *Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,*

2 Peter 3:14 - *But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;*

and ask yourself: What would my immediate reaction be if I were suddenly told that the Lord was coming in two hours' time?

Many Christians, on receiving such a message, would need every bit of two hours to prepare for His coming.

Apologies would have to be made -

Matthew 5:23-24 - *Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;
24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*

debts would have to be paid -

Romans 13:8 - *Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.*

books would have to be burnt -

Acts 19:19 - *Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.*

loved ones would have to be warned -

Genesis 19:14 - *And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law.*

cheques would have to be written -

Malachi 3:8 - *Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have*

we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

confessions would have to be made -

Matthew 18:15-16 - *Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.*

etc., etc.!

Well, the fact is He is coming - and He may come soon.

The practical effect of this truth should be an incentive to holy living. If we are expecting Him to come, we shall desire to be found of Him -

2 Peter 3:14 - *Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.*

Colossians 3:2-5 - *Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.*

3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

4 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:

1 John 2:28 - *And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.*

2. IF WE BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS COMING AGAIN SOON, WE SHALL BE FAR MORE INTERESTED IN THE WORLD TO COME THAN IN THIS WORLD.

Study carefully -

2 Peter 3:13 - *Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.*

That does not mean that we, as Christians, are not to be interested in the betterment of social conditions, etc.

As a matter of fact, most of the great institutions existing today for the amelioration of suffering, the care of the poor, the abolition of bad living conditions, etc., were initiated by Christians - e.g. Lord Shaftesbury, Dr. Barnado, Elizabeth Fry.

We have a definite contribution to make to the society of which we form a part.

We are to shine as lights -

Matthew 5:16 - *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

to be as salt -

Matthew 5:13 - *Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.*

exercising a purifying influence in the community in which we live. But, this world is not our home. We are only pilgrims passing through on our way to Heaven. We are citizens of Heaven.

Philippians 3:20 - *For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:*

We are not pessimists because we believe that this poor old world is doomed. We are optimists, for we also -

2 Peter 3:13 - *Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.*

So we cannot afford to be 'worldly' Christians, living in bondage to the sins and follies of this world.

Matthew 6:19-20 - *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:
20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:*

Titus 2:12-13 - *Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;
13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;*

1 John 2:15-17 - *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.
16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.
17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*

3. IF WE BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS COMING AGAIN SOON, WE SHALL BE DEEPLY CONCERNED FOR THE SALVATION OF THOSE WHO ARE NOT READY TO MEET HIM.

2 Peter 3:9 - *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

2 Peter 3:15 - *And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;*

remind us of the Lord's wonderful compassion towards those who are perishing -

John 3:16 - *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

We, who are His servants, should share His deep concern for the salvation of men and women. The signs of the times tell us that the coming of the Lord is very near -

James 5:8 - *Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*

How wonderful it will be for us when He comes! But how solemn for those who are not ready to meet Him and to whom He will say -

Luke 13:27 - *But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.*

Let us buy up every opportunity of bringing the gospel to those whose need is so desperate.

John 4:35 - *Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.*

4. IF WE BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS COMING AGAIN SOON, WE SHALL BE STEADFAST IN THE MIDST OF WORSENING CONDITIONS IN THE WORLD.

2 Peter 3:17 - *Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.*

tells us this. Of course we must expect conditions in the world to get worse. But, a world that has rejected God and His Son, and that has spurned the divine remedy for sin and every malady of man, can never get better apart from divine intervention.

It is in this desperately sin-stricken world that you and I, who love the Lord, are to find encouragement, hope and inspiration in the calm assurance that our Sovereign Lord, Who is on the throne, will shortly step down and put all wrongs right.

To know God and to be initiated into the mystery of His intention for the coming days - this is the secret of assurance and peace.

Isaiah 26:3 - *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.*

5. IF WE BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS COMING AGAIN SOON, WE SHALL DESIRE, ABOVE ALL ELSE, TO GROW IN GRACE AND IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIM.

This is what is suggested in -

2 Peter 3:18 - *But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.*

Do you know Him as your Saviour, Friend and Lord? If not -

Job 22:21 - *Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee.*

If you do know Him, how much do you know Him?

John 14:9 - *Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?*

Do you share Paul's ambition?

Philippians 3:10 - *That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;*

The way to grow in grace and to know Him better is to be much alone with Him in prayer.

Matthew 6:6 - *But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*

and to meditate constantly upon His Word -

Psalms 119:97 - *O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.*

Let us pray that the daily anticipation of our Lord's sure return will inspire us to live lives that are well-pleasing to Him, to live in the light of eternity, to reach out for the salvation of others, to be quiet and confident in the midst of international confusion and chaos, and above all else, to know Him Whom to know is life eternal.