

DO AND TEACH

The Acts

Thoughts come from a wide variety of sources. Some from messages I have heard from individuals, some from assembly Bible studies, some from home life and some from books I have read. The Holy Spirit is the Teacher who makes them real to me.

- "Acts of the Apostles," by G. Campbell Morgan
- "What the Bible Teaches, Acts," by J. Anderson
- "The Life Application Bible." Tyndale House and Zondervan
- "Acts, a study in New Testament Christianity," by J. Heading
- "The Acts of the Apostles," by A.C. Gaebelein

Acts is an account as to how the message of the Gospel began with a small group of disciples and traveled across the Roman Empire. They preached in synagogues, schools, homes, market-places, court-rooms, streets, hills, ships and desert roads. Wherever God sent them, lives and history were changed. The plan of the Lord Jesus was for them to begin at Jerusalem; then Judea; then Samaria and then to the ends of the earth. Some Jews believed, and many of the Gentiles believed and received the Gospel. Assemblies were started and believers began to grow in the Christian life.

It is also a theological book regarding the Holy Spirit, church relationships and organization, implications of grace and the law of love. It is also an apologetic work, building a case for the validity of Christ's claims and promises. Main themes are: Church beginnings, new churches were then and are today continually being formed. Empowerment by the Holy Spirit overcomes the obstacles in these new beginnings. The Holy Spirit: His work demonstrates the supernatural evidences of Christianity. We are Holy Spirit-conscious rather than problem-conscious. Church growth: Acts presents the history of the growing work from Jerusalem to Syria, Africa, Asia and Europe. In 100 years "the faith" spread from the Jews in Jerusalem to non-Jews in 39 cities and 30 countries. Witnessing: From the apostles and their converts came the witness to personal faith in Christ. Personal testimony, preaching, defense before authorities made the story of the Gospel clear with boldness and courage to large and small groups alike. As God's people, we are chosen to be part of His plan to reach the world. In love and by faith, the Holy Spirit helps us to witness and preach. Witnessing strengthens our faith as we confront people who challenge our faith. Opposition: the catalyst for the spread of the Gospel. Opposition is not an obstacle to God.

Acts 1:1. *"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,"*

DO AND TEACH

The things that He did began long ago -
Way back before the foundations of earth.
God carefully planned things, that He might show,
His love, beginning with Jesus' miraculous birth.
More than creation, and more than maintaining,
All the works of His word and His power;
Are the works Jesus did, God's grace revealing,
From His birth to His death's final hour.
He lived what He taught, there was never a doubt,
That His person was unique among men.
In every act that He did and word that He taught,
There was evidence He was God's unique Son.
He knew what His work was when He came here to live,
And He knew when He had finished each task.
The truths that He taught, and His life that He gave,
Made it possible for our understanding to grasp.
Whether we read of His acts or the parables He told,
The evidence is plain enough for each one to find -
The way of salvation and, in faith we take hold,
Of the truths God reveals to our minds.

"Father, I can lay hold in faith on all the things I read in the scriptures as the Holy Spirit makes things plain. This book of Acts is so practical that even a simple person like me can fit into the truths and actions of those who had seen and heard the Lord when He was here. My concern is that I live by faith in the Son of God each and every day, In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 1:1-8

FORTY DAYS

The first book "Luke, the beloved physician" wrote covered some events over a period of over 30 years that changed a nation and provided blessing for the world. When the Lord Jesus Christ was here, "God manifest in the flesh," He fulfilled the scriptures concerning His birth, life, death and resurrection that made those who followed Him, different people. The Person of the Lord Jesus Christ and His teaching brought into view a whole new view of the value of a person and the importance of life when lived as God intends. Jesus didn't only teach, He lived what He taught. More than that, He wasn't a lone solitary figure who was distant or aloof from other people who did not have His moral character. He deliberately made Himself available to all who came to Him and on other occasions joined Himself to others who needed Him without ever compromising His moral worth, His divine nature or His Father's will. During those years He chose others to be with Him so He could prepare them to take His "yoke upon them" and learn of Him. At the same time He never forbade those who joined themselves to Him and "ministered unto Him." It is often harder to graciously receive benefits from others than it is to give to them. The Lord appreciated the willingness of those women from Galilee to serve Him, as well as those faithful followers who were not of the twelve and who followed Him and heard Him speak. They saw the wonders of His life and work bring blessing to thousands of people. A man named Matthias was among that group.

During the last week of the Lord's public ministry that finally ended in "the death of the cross," those closest to Him forsook Him and fled. What they thought was going to happen didn't. Fear clamped its strong hand on even the boldest of them and they were powerless to overcome it - until Jesus appeared in their midst after His resurrection. "He showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs."

There are a number of "40s" mentioned in the scriptures. The forty years of wandering in the wilderness by the children of Israel when compared with the other "40s," teach us that there are times of testing that are needed for specific purposes. Perhaps the forty days after Christ's resurrection are the most important of all as to their impact on those people of that day and all down through the centuries until now. During that time the risen Lord was with His disciples and He taught them truths concerning the kingdom of God that would have given them a whole new view of the kingdom teaching they heard before His death, burial and resurrection.

They knew Israel was going to be restored as a kingdom but learned His timetable was not the same as theirs. Every time they saw the Lord Jesus and heard Him speak to them, they would be reminded of the fact the One they saw die on the cross, the One who did not just vanish but was buried in Joseph's new tomb, was the same Person who was speaking to them. Peter and James would never forget their private conversations with Him. Mary Magdalene and the other women would look at Him and be assured that all they had hoped for Him was going to come to pass. The two who walked with Him on the road to Emmaus and got a private exposition of the scriptures concerning Him would not ever be the same. The group of 500 who gathered in Galilee and saw Him there would spread the word that He who was dead is alive.

That life-changing forty days would never leave their minds as during the ensuing years they were going through persecution and opposition in public forums and in court rooms. There was no way they could change the fact that they had seen, and heard, and been with the living Savior for forty days. That was no fleeting glimpse of some ethereal form. He was among them in a bodily form. As those forty days were ending, on one occasion when He was eating with those who were assembled in Jerusalem, He told them to stay in that city until the Holy Spirit came and indwelt them, giving power to them to fulfill the commission He was going to give. They knew He was going to leave them but as true disciples, they were now willing to do what he said, where he wanted, and not insert their own wishes again as Peter and some of the disciples did in a moment of self-will. Their fishing days were over. Now they had a different calling.

We will have our testing times. There will be those things happen to us to cause us to wonder at the way God has led us and why certain things have happened. But our experiences with the Lord in the past, and our assurance that His sovereign will is supreme in our lives, will give us the courage and confidence to press ahead in faith to accomplish what He has given us to do for Him and the furtherance of His kingdom. We don't have to know the final conclusion of events in our lives and the results that come from the labors we engage in. We just have to remember who we serve. Testing times are really profitable to us.

For forty days in the wilderness the Lord had nothing to eat
When those days were past, the devil must have thought He was weak
Because in the order of temptation he appealed first to the Lord with bread
But in every testing the enemy used, the Lord told what the scriptures said.

There was never a question of His perfection, sinless ness was His nature
Authority was challenged when as a man, Satan tempted Him as a human creature

Even though in fashion as a man, His eternal being and character never changed His deity was never compromised, there was nothing in Him that could be blamed.

Now at the end of His time here on earth another forty days had a reason
The evidence was given to disciples, death has only a limited season
He who held the keys used them to accomplish the Father's will
The purpose for which he came, He fully and forever fulfilled.

For those forty days those who saw Him and heard the teaching He gave
Learned that they needed power beyond what they naturally have
In order to do God's will another Person would give the needed power
He would guide them, teach them and fill them, and through them blessings pour.

"Father, in Thy grace Thou hast saved people here. May Thy servant be able to teach them Thy truth in a way they can all understand. May the words I use and illustrations be relevant to what they are experiencing in their lives. I need The, Gracious Father, to guide and control my wandering mind. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 1:8

WITNESSES UNTO ME

The *personal* testimony of the real witness [Acts 1:1-8] makes what they have to say of great value. What a person has learned by experience can't be denied. No one can take from a person that which has actually happened to them. The only consideration when passing on a personal witness to others is that it must be scriptural to be right. If what a person testifies about is based on feelings, dreams or opinions that are condemned or contrary to the Bible teaching, it is not given by the Holy Spirit. A person with talent, training, and experience but without spiritual power is ineffective. Personal experience must be behind all true teaching and preaching. "After that the Holy Ghost is come upon you..."

The *power* of the real witness [Acts 1:8] is very impacting to those who watch as well as hear what he/she has to say. Empowerment from the Holy Spirit is not limited to strength beyond the ordinary. It involves courage, boldness, confidence, insight, ability and authority. We are animated and given power by a better spirit than our own. This enables us to preach the Gospel and prove it from the scriptures. These did not have strength of their own for preaching, nor wisdom, nor courage enough. But Christ's witnesses receive Christ's power for the work to which He calls them. He will qualify those He uses in His service and be with them in that service. They would proclaim Him King; and publish those truths to the world how His kingdom will be set up and how He would rule. They would prove this message with the proof of the gifts and the confirmation of their own testimony and experience in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth. They would witness with extraordinary results.

The *progress* of the real witness [Acts 1:8] guides as to the time, place and the manner of testimony we should give. They were to wait for the Spirit to be sent. They were to be in a position and condition to receive the Spirit and He would give them power. He would produce amazing results through them. The disciples had seen and heard the Lord Jesus Christ after His resurrection but needed divine power to declare what they had seen.

Acts 1:7. *"And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power."*

WAITING.

Waiting is hard because time seems to be wasted,
When something is not being produced, added to or blasted.
But when we don't know what to do to produce a desired result -
To jump ahead of God's will is a serious fault.

When the right time came there was no questioning the fact -
The Holy Spirit had come and it was now time to act -
But until that power came from God it was the time to sit still -
Waiting until they could be sure of God's divine will.

The Lord spoke final words and then moved on to heaven -
Waiting was essential until the Holy Ghost was given.
May I not jump ahead until I know what is right -
Then I can live and act in faith, not limited by sight.

"I am praying Father God, that I will learn the value of patient waiting. Far too often I

confess to being an impatient waiter” trying to figure out ahead of time what needs to be done from my own perspective instead of waiting on Thee. Even here Father, in these meetings, I am wondering what is going to happen. Still, I acknowledge that after reading this young man’s thesis on 1st Timothy, that this is a good and profitable way to further Thy work. May I be willing to trust Thee for these waiting times. Amen.”

Acts 1:11. *“Which also said, ‘Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.’”*

THIS SAME JESUS.

There are others occasionally around claiming the worship of honest men.

Who is the real One who died on the cross for my sin?

There are some things about my Lord, that identify only Him
As the One who has power to forgive sins - He is God’s unique Son.

The words that He spoke were different from the speech of all those around.
Conviction of sin, brought sinners down to their knees on the ground.
The truths He taught were with power- there was no comparison found,
Demons in human bodies did tremble, as chains they had formed were unbound.

His miracles made it plain, Jesus was God here in the flesh.
The hungry He fed and healed the lame; He healed the blind and the deaf.
Three dead ones were raised, lepers were cleansed - all these truly attest,
What He did, and is made plain to us, truly Jesus is the Christ.

There on that hilltop near the city for the eyes of each watching one to see,
Is evidence - blood, nail prints, where He was nailed to Calvary’s tree.
I know from the witnesses who saw Him rise - only He can be,
The Savior, my Lord, who ascended and is coming back for me.

“O God, who received the Victor back to sit on the right hand of Thy throne: I am waiting for the day when He who ascended before the eyes of a few, comes back to receive us to Himself. I want to be sure that no passing day will catch me without thoughts of His return. I am waiting - and watching, In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Acts 1:12-26

Acts 1:24. *“And they prayed and said, ‘Thou Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two Thou hast chosen...”*

YOU KNOW, PLEASE SHOW.

It is possible that we may forget that everything is open and known to God. We can get all stressed out over things that God has under control and forget that the problem is – we don’t know what God has already planned out. It is our responsibility to be close enough to the Lord that we can know “who He has chosen.” When God’s people come together in fellowship, all that we have experienced with the Lord is our most favored topic of conversation. The Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven and the promise of His return was given again to those eleven by messengers from heaven. “This same Jesus... shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.” The two brothers of the Lord, James and Jude now met with the believers who gathered together in an upper room to wait and pray. All those who had seen the risen Lord were come together to wait for the promised Holy Spirit.

There are time when the best thing we can do is to wait and pray. Praying does more than just unload our burdens, requests, and thanksgivings to God. It put us in such close proximity to Him that He can make clear to us His choices, His will, His mind and His plans with the simple means of divine communication to the heart. God will do what is right in His own time and way. The first thing the company of believers did together after the Lord Jesus ascended was to fulfill the scriptures that told of another person who was to take Judas’ place. It is hard for us to conceive that one who had heard the Lord Jesus teach and preach like Judas did, would deliberately reject Christ. Judas never repented and went to perdition. Even though some people are close to the truth, they are not committed to the truth.

An election is coming soon – “Whether of these two Thou hast chosen.” A meeting is coming up – “Which of these two messages would Thou have me to speak on.” A series of meetings for believers – “Which of these two lines of teaching should we speak of here.” Matthias was one who followed the Lord right from the beginning of His ministry even though he was not one of the twelve. A faithful person who can be trusted even though he is not seen as a public person is a very valuable person in the work of the Lord. One has

well written, "It takes more grace than I can tell, to play the second fiddle well." A trustworthy person is a great person to work with and include in a special service for God. Make sure when asking one to do a work for the Lord they meet the scriptural standards God expects of them in life. Examine carefully the choices you have. Pray for wisdom and be willing to act on the guidance the Spirit of God gives.

"It is all known to Thee, Lord. What is most appropriate, what is most needful, what is most urgent, what will bring most glory to Thy name. Make it known to me please. Show me! Amen."

Acts 2:1-13

IN HIS OWN LANGUAGE

Significantly the Church began at Pentecost, the harvest festival, and continues today. How could they fulfill the commission? Together, and with God's power. The Great Commission is a major factor in every decision we make. Matthew gives the command. 28:18-20. Mark gives the scope of the command, "the world..." 16:15. Luke tells how to fulfill it. "...understand the scriptures..." 24:45-48. John gives the cast. "As the Father hath sent Me, so send I you." 20:19-21. Acts tells how this was done. The Holy Spirit only came in this manner on that occasion. He doesn't do the same thing over and over at our requests. "By one Spirit have we all been baptized into one Body." When we are saved, we are placed into that Body along with every member - past, present and future - of that great dispensational Church. As individuals when God saves us by His grace, we have been convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit, we were regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Then He dwells in us, anoints us, seals us and is the earnest (guarantee) of our inheritance. The 3000 who were saved at the end of Peter's message stood together with the 120 who at the first were baptized in the Spirit. Now all together they were immersed into one body of believers - the Body of Christ.

The fifteen groups of people who were in Jerusalem attending the Feast of Weeks, heard the Gospel in their own language and were all united by the Holy Spirit into that Body. Each one was indwelt by the Spirit and from Jerusalem, those new Jewish believers would take the Spirit of God in them to their own countries. There the Gospel would spread from them and through them as the Holy Spirit continued the work begun in Jerusalem at the day of Pentecost. That day of Pentecost when the Feast of Weeks (the harvest festival) was celebrated, the wind as a symbol of the unseen Holy Spirit, and the light that looked like fire symbolizing the power of the Holy Spirit, was on each person in the upper room. Those symbols were not needed as evidence again. The evidence was now visible in 3000 people saved that day and each one was a temple of the Holy Spirit. That first baptism never had to be repeated because the whole body was baptized when there was 120 at the beginning. It was a complete body that began small and has been growing ever since.

Those early believers had the Great Commission burning in their hearts. They started out their lives for the Lord by being under the authority of the Word. The Gospel was forever on their lips as they went from Jerusalem to their own countries and their own homes. Right from the beginning Christ was Lord of their lives.

Acts 2: 10-11. *"Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God."*

WONDERFUL WORKS OF GOD.

It was a wonderful work of God when He created the world and all the universe.

It was a wonderful work of God when He created man in His own image.

It was a wonderful work of God when He delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt.

It was a wonderful work of God when He parted the Red Sea so Israel could pass through.

It was a wonderful work of God when He fed the nation forty years and brought them into Canaan.

It was a wonderful work of God when Christ came into the world by miraculous birth.

It was a wonderful work of God when He changed water into wine and fed the hungry.

It was a wonderful work of God when He walked on the waters of Galilee.

It was a wonderful work of God when He raised three dead people of differing ages.

It was a wonderful work of God when He forgave the sins of the guilty who called on Him.

It was a wonderful work of God when Jesus died for our sins on the cross.

It was a wonderful work of God when He rose from the dead three days after He died.

It was a wonderful work of God when He ascended into heaven promising to return.

It was a wonderful work of God when He saved me by His grace over 60 years ago.

It is a wonderful work of God to keep me day by day anticipating His return.

"O God my gracious Father, I thank Thee for all the wonders of Thyself, and the works which Thou hast done that we might believe. I do believe without question that Jesus

Christ is the Son of God. I believe He is the only way of salvation. I believe He is my own Savior and Lord. I believe He is coming again to receive me unto Himself - any day all. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 2:22. *"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:"*

A MAN APPROVED OF GOD.

Right at home where He was raised - and rejected by men;
Approved, as the God-Man moving untouched above the cliff -
The fulfillment of scripture made public as He read -
Then explained - He was a Man approved of God.

Moving through the pressing crowd - officers on a mission,
"Take Him" - but reaching hands could not overtake listening ears.
Thirsting hearts overcome orders of mere envious, religious leaders -
"Never man spake like this Man" - to officers, He was a Man approved of God.

Standing in the suddenly motionless boat on a calm sea -
Moments before clinging tightly in a wildly tossing storm -
White-knuckled hands released; loud shouting voices now mere whispers.
"What manner of man is this" - to disciples He was a Man approved of God.

A dying thief watches, listens and changes his mind.
He has seen and heard the difference between them -
He admits he is a malefactor; he is a thief getting what he deserves.
Jesus: "This Man has done nothing amiss" - He is a Man approved of God.

The centurion responsible to carry out a perversion of justice -
Listens, watches, experiences the darkness - feels the ground shake;
Heard the loud cry, "Finished!" Sees the breaking stones - the blood and water -
"This was a righteous man" - to the soldiers He is a Man approved of God.

"O God who found great delight in the Perfect Man: what a joy it must have been to Thee to watch the life and work of the only perfect human who ever lived. This was the way it is supposed to be always and with everyone. But I am thankful that He was willing to be my substitute and give His righteous acceptance to me. I am Thy child, Father, and I worship Thee here in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 2:14-47

"WHAT SHALL WE DO?"

The was no question about it - something unique and full of wonder had happened to those who followed Jesus. The baptism of the Holy Spirit had united them as one body. Now the filling of the Spirit gave power to Peter to stand up with the other disciples in front of a huge crowd of people, and with power, this man who had become a man of humility and grace, spoke for God. This dynamic speaker was able to be used by God even though he had made some serious mistakes before. When genuine repentance takes place in a believer, God forgives and can use us to serve Him effectively again.

The message Peter gave began with claiming the attention of the crowd by explaining what was happening around them. Then he wisely directed their thoughts to the Word of God and applied it to what was happening right in their midst. The fulfillment of prophecy would have been of great interest to those Jewish people. The Messiah was the hope of Israel and Peter testified that was who Jesus is. At the end of the message he applied the truths he had taught to the people in that place at that very moment. Those who knew the scriptures and believed the promises of God, would have been aware of a coming day when the Holy Spirit would come. When it was pointed out to them that this what was taking place that day, it brought an awakening of great interest and brought deep conviction.

Peter reinforced his message by openly and plainly speaking about Jesus and the resurrection. he laid the charge of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ right on them. They could go to the place where He was crucified and everyone in the city ("this thing was not done in a corner") would know He had died there and how He died. The great earthquakes that happened on the Passover weekend would still be a hot topic of conversation along with the hours of darkness that had covered the whole land for three hours only a little over a month before. But now, even further, they could go and see the empty tomb where He had been buried. Peter was not laughed at or scorned that day because the evidence was undeniable. It is an

important part of any message to address undeniable facts that explain or illustrate things people do not understand.

A second portion of scripture was applied to what was happening and Peter again shows the power of fulfilled prophecy as a proof of the resurrection of Christ and the authority of the risen Lord to send the Holy Spirit that day. The evidence of the Holy Spirit given the ability to speak in languages not previously learned was a sign to the Jews that was unmistakable. Everyone knows it takes time to learn a different language, so this instantaneous ability had to come from God because they were speaking of the wonderful works of God. Then Peter applied the whole event to the Person and work of Christ. It is important for us to make sure people understand their need before we give the solution to the problem. To jump ahead to the answer before the problem is faced can lead to people thinking they are saved when they are not. Repentance and obedience to God is not just a casual nod of the head or a light-hearted approach to sin. A person must turn in repentance from sin and rebellion to God, and to Christ for mercy, forgiveness and salvation. Far too often people are misled or mistaken when they look at themselves and their own understanding of their need and the way of salvation. Asking "Jesus into my heart" can fatally stumble a person who has not recognized their guilt and need of the Savior.

Peter continued to give instruction and challenge to those who heard and indicated by their words their real conviction of sin and a desire to do something about it. We are not given all the words that Peter preached that day but we know they "gladly received his word" and went ahead to publicly declare their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ by baptism by immersion in water. The 3000 who were added to the 120 gathered in that place would have moved the whole city to know that God had visited His chosen people.

The on-going evidence of the reality of faith in Christ is the same now as it was then. When one is genuinely saved by God's grace and the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit is evident, they want to learn from the Word of God and practice what they learn. There is a desire to be with the people of God and share in common their new life in Christ with other saints. The fellowship they are willing to continue in indicates a real commitment to Christ, to His Word, to His people and to the activities of the assembly of God's people. They want to remember the Lord Jesus Christ in the Lord's Supper. Fellowship and participation in prayer is part of the steadfast commitment they have. The new birth creates a new creation. The new creation indicates a new nature. The new nature produces a new life-style. The new life-style brings about a new commitment that we share in common with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Spiritual life changes everything. Joy and peace are found in places and by means which were previously avoided. People who were once looked down on are now looked up to. Things we once wanted to do are replaced by activities that are morally upright and principled. There is a desire to give of what we have for the blessing of others rather than to make demands for our own advancement. Each day brings new opportunities we seek to claim for God and the benefit of God's people. We find our souls and spirits are knit together with other believers and we seek out their company.

When God's people are finding joy, strength and real meaning in life, over the passing of time sincere seekers after God will know who to come to. The attraction of vital, vigorous Christian faith has power because of the Holy Spirit using and filling God's people. There is a beauty and appeal to genuine praise for God that is unmistakable. Most people are longing for what the Spirit of God brings to believers, but they are not willing to repent of their sins and turn from their ways to the Lord. It is beyond the ability of preachers, teachers - even the apostles to save people who are not willing to be saved themselves. The Lord is the One who leads those who have been given new life by the Holy Spirit, and adds them to the church.

It is our responsibility to know the scriptures well enough to be able to apply God's truth to the need of the people who come for guidance. We need to be able to explain the way of salvation clearly and without compromise in any way, and do it with gracious words and a compassionate spirit. The "Lord's messenger in the Lord's message" is able to be used by God to speak for Him and be a channel of blessing to earnest seekers of salvation.

 "Why are they asking such questions? Isn't what they have enough?
 Stick with what you already have. The way of the cross is rough!"
 But no, there is a need within the seeker the Spirit of God has awakened.
 The wages and consequences of sin has left the lost soul quite shaken.
 So walking away in their spirit from the crowd whose objective in life is fun -
 They face up to their guilt, and truly repent, and in faith turn to God's Son
 Who died on the cross for our sins and in resurrection now justifies;
 Any person who comes to Him by faith, and on His righteousness alone relies.

 "Why are they not coming with us? Do they think they are better than we?
 What is with that separated crowd? What is it they seem to see?"

Actually, it is not in the people, but in the One they gather to -
Who is the moral and spiritual attraction, and who separates the false from the true?
It is God the Spirit who is working and giving them the right answers to life.
By His gracious revealing in scripture, we have turned from darkness to light.
New life has a whole new objective, we can see God's guidance in all these things.
And when we obey His directives, a sense of joy and satisfaction it brings.

"Why do they go to that place? There is nothing there to attract?
If they only knew what we say, when we talk about them behind their back!"
Well yes, we know saints are not perfect, they are only sinners saved by grace.
And they have found faith to be strengthened when they come together in this place.
Here the Word of God is opened, here instructions from the scripture is given.
And in spiritual songs we give praise that ascends to our Father in heaven.
We begin each week by remembering our Lord in His own appointed way.
In remembrance and worship, we review the cost of redemption as we begin this day.

"Why do they keep on going? Are they not really bored by now?
They keep talking about 'Saved,' and when it happened and how!"
When something important happens, it is not very easy to forget.
The greatest of all these is salvation which we never want to ignore or neglect.
So, the words of the songs we sing have meaning that we use to express our faith.
The teaching we learn from is scriptural so that by it we can reflect God's grace.
The worship we express is not formal, from our hearts we express gratitude.
By our gathering together to Him, we grow spiritually and maintain godly attitude.

"Father, in Thy gracious will guide Thy servant today to be faithful in words and deeds to Thee and to Thy people. May there be grace in my lips, truth in my heart, and faith in my actions. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 2:36. *"God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."*

THE LORD - REALLY!

There is no other "Jesus". There are other people called Jesus, but "That same Jesus" stands unique among all men, angels and ages. He is the One who is the Lord and Master of the universe. He died, and rose and revived that He might be Lord, both of the dead and the living. He is the One we confessed as Lord, when we were saved. He alone has the right of Supreme Lordship. It is evident when He is Lord indeed of my life, when I do the things that He says. If there is no desire for obedience to Him, then He is not Lord. If there are areas of life that I preserve for myself alone, then He is not Lord. If there are hidden agendas in which I don't want His input, then He is not Lord.

As "the Christ", He is the One with a mission to accomplish. He has come and He has, and does, save sinners. The One who was Anointed to bring life and immortality to light, is the Christ. The reason for His coming has been made abundantly clear – to do the will of God and to bring us to glory with Him. But "the path to the cross He was willing to tread, all the sins of my life to forgive." How thankful I am that I can say like Peter, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." How I would like to say that to Him myself!

"Father, how grateful I am that You have given Him that high place that He deserves. Give me the grace and wisdom to do the same myself. I don't want to withhold from Him anything that is His! Amen."

Acts 2:42. *"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."*

CONTINUED STEADFASTLY.

They had real love for the Word, these first-generation saints in the past.
The truth contained in its pages is as complete as it is vast.
They believed what was written without question from the first page to the last -
And the doctrine they learned when they were taught, they were able to easily grasp.

There was love among them for each sister and brother.
Fellowship meant they truly cared the one for the other.
Sharing life in common was real when they gathered together.
There was love for each other, for they had the same Father.

When they came together on Lord's Day for the breaking of bread;
There was remembrance of the Lord and the words He had said.
There was love for the Lord and the blood that He shed -

And they were sure He loved them, and was now raised from the dead.

As they met together steadfastly and continued on in prayer -
It was with confident assurance that God really did hear.
Their prayer would show love for the perishing - those that were dear
To the hearts of each one who had willingly gathered there.

The same love for the Word - is in the doctrine we teach.
Love for each other in fellowship - closes every breach.
Love for the Lord at His table - shows the Gospel we preach.
Love for the sinners we pray for - that the lost we might effectively reach.

“Father, give us the willingness to continue steadfastly as those in the early assemblies did. Please keep before us, by Thy Spirit, the value of the doctrines as are taught in the scriptures. Help us maintain a warmth among us that our fellowship might be real and not affected. May the remembrance of the Lord in the breaking of bread never become “man-centered.” When we pray, help us to be genuine in our communication with Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Acts 3:1-11

THROUGH FAITH IN HIS NAME

There is a time for everything. There was the "fullness of the times" when the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to redeem us. There are "times of visitation" when in remarkable ways God makes Himself known to many that they may be blessed by Him. There have been times in the history of God's people when miracles were common place events. For forty years Israelites received tons of food every day until, not only did they become used to it, but actually complained about it. Through Israel's history there were those times when events occurred to bring about specific results. When the Lord Jesus was here there were many miraculous signs to the Jews that showed God's approval of Him. It seems like that time of miracle working continued into the early days of the church so Jews would recognize the approval of God upon the preaching of the Gospel, the authority of the apostles, and the establishment of New Testament assemblies.

The first recorded miracle done by the apostles after the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven, took place at the gate of the temple where Old Testament religious practitioners were continuing what they had become used to. Prayer is always in order no matter in what dispensation so that it is possible for us to communicate with God. But there were still sacrifices being made at those prayer times, so God opened the way for Peter and John to declare the Gospel right where it was most needed. The crippled beggar had been placed there many times before and was expecting nothing more than what was usual from religious Jews.

In this case personal interest was shown in the needy man, not just an accepted religious practice for one to feel better about themselves for giving alms. Peter and John stood still while all the other people went on in the normal way, to do the normal thing, in the normal place - and they focused their attention on the beggar, not on his cup to receive gifts. They also insisted that he focus his attention on them. When dealing with people to whom we want to present the Gospel, we need to be sure they know we have an interest in them personally. They need to know we are speaking to them personally and expect them to personally listen to us. It is no casual matter when we speak for God to a crowd of people or to an individual. It is up to us not only to put our undivided attention on the needy person but to claim their undivided attention on us. Illustrative speaking like the Lord Jesus did is still a proper way to claim and hold the attention of listeners.

Peter addressed the man on his own terms. He knew the man's need was probably different from what he wanted. The beggar had become used to attending only to what he wanted - silver and gold. In these two men was the understanding of his real need, and that is what they addressed. They went to the source of his problem and dealt with the fundamental need of him not being able to walk. By the authority of "Jesus Christ of Nazareth" the beggar had to face the basic need was the problem of his infirmity. When that was addressed, he was immediately, and completely healed. There is power in Jesus' name. The result was not a shuffling walk that was gradually improved or eliminated after some long form of physical therapy. Full strength came instantly so that muscles long atrophied were full and ready for use - and the man leaped into the air and was able to walk without assistance. That was evidence of a divinely healed body. He praised God as evidence of a healed spirit that recognized this was a work of God, done by the Holy Spirit, in the power of the name of Jesus Christ, through the channel of two men who could speak for God.

Our commission to the world has been given to us by the One who has all power in heaven and on earth. There is no reason to hesitate to act in full faith as we guide people through the Word of God to face their need of a Savior from sin and to point them through the scriptures to see what the Lord Jesus has done for

them. They need to hear from God's Word themselves what the result faith in Christ alone brings. Any result that comes from a scriptural message of the Gospel and leads people to repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ is a work God alone can produce. It is not in our power or ability that gives light and life to the needy souls of people. It is the Holy Spirit through human vessels who reveals the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior of lost souls who accomplishes the work of salvation.

It is right to expect those who have been given new life in Christ to accompany us to express our gratitude to God and submission to His will. The newly healed cripple associated himself with Peter and John as they went together into the temple to pray. Not only should we be glad when those God saves are willing to be with us, but we should expect that and promote it. Our mandate is from the risen Lord and we are to baptize new believers and help them continue on to practice what they have been taught. We are not done with new Christians until they are able to do the same for others in their sphere of influence that we have done for them.

The act of stopping to address the source of one man's problem opened the door of blessing to many others. We never know the results of one act of faith on our part that will lead to blessing for another person, and through that person the multiplying principle that is so essential in the work of the Gospel, continues on far farther than we could imagine.

When he was carried there and laid where many people passed by,
He probably never in his wildest dreams realized what blessing was drawing nigh.
A hope for a little financial assistance was all he had come to expect.
A cure for the problem seemed impossible, so lasting hope he probably chose to forget.

But God who knows the heart of every man was inclined to show this man His grace.
When laid there in the morning, he never thought this was the end of this place.
Two men guided by the will of God and under the authority of divine commission,
Were able to speak for God and deal permanently with the man's condition.

Our God is the same today as He was in the days long ago and past.
He brings healing to the darkened souls because on Him our sins were cast,
And one who is willing to trust alone in Him who has all authority and power
That is needed to cleanse us from all sin, God will in mercy save this hour.

Those who move among the lost and condemned, have a mandate to fulfill.
Into our keeping God has given His Gospel that today has all power still
To bring repentance and faith in the Savior when to its message they pay heed.
It is up to the messengers to present the truth so each one will see their need.

When one is saved by God's grace, they need others who will associate
With them as they grow in faith and a real interest in them do take.
Help them to learn to pray, teach them how God's Word and will to learn.
Then when difficult situations arise in their lives they will know where to turn.

"Father, I believe there are some in this place who feel like they have been more or less neglected. For Thine own reason we have been brought here, so please guide us this day to those who need encouragement and some special attention. Give to Thy servant a clear understanding of the subject to be spoken of tonight. Help me to be relevant and careful in applying Thy truth. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 3:1, 3, 4, 11 *"Peter and John went up together...; a certain man ... seeing Peter and John...; Peter fastening his eyes upon him with John...; the lame man which was healed held Peter and John."*

TOGETHER.

These two men were together in their desire to pray. They were also together in public testimony. They were together in their zeal for good works. They were together in sharing blessing. The evidence of our fellowship as laborers together is not only experienced personally, but is seen by those who look on. It is such an important part of our testimony, that we can never allow it to be in jeopardy for any reason.

Names linked together in the service of the Lord has always been a testimony of strength and power: Paul and Barnabas; Paul and Silas; Peter and John; Herb Harris and Albert Joyce; Frank Percy and Doug Howard – these all are names of men linked together that have been a power for God.

Peter and John were together at the time of prayer – they knew where the power lay. The lame man saw

evidence of their togetherness by the direction they traveled together – he knew where their common interests lay. When the time for action had come, they both looked intently at the lame man – they knew where the need lay. When the miracle of healing was accomplished – he knew where the channel of blessing lay. Peter and John – examples to me of what it is supposed to be like in any work we do for God. There is no place for personal supremacy. We are laborers together with God.

“Please Lord, keep from me, any desire to be above my fellow-laborers: whether it be Linda, or any other people that we may be working with at the time. May we always be one in the work, that all glory may be Thine. Amen”

Acts 3:9. *“And all the people saw him walking and praising God:”*

LINKS.

Some things are linked in most unusual ways.
Others linked commonly in the words that we say.
“Silver and gold” go together by use,
For we need them to buy whatever we choose.
But for the needs that are important - the things that will last,
We need more than mere money that is very soon lost.

The walk of my life when looked at alone,
Doesn't set me apart from almost everyone.
However, when praise to God is linked with my walk,
“Walk and praising” goes way beyond “talking the talk.”
Those two set apart the normal things that I do;
Making clear that I praise Him, and want to live for Him too.

To folks looking on there can be wonder inside
When questions arise, but they soon subside
Unless the actions they see stand out so unusual to them,
That with “wonder and amazement”, they ask questions of him
They all knew who was changed so dramatically by God,
That now they will listen when one preaches the Word.

Two men who shared their life in the Lord,
Were “Peter and John” going out into the world
To preach the Gospel as the Lord had commanded,
And now responding with grace openly, not underhanded,
Lest people would think they were claiming some prize;
They made sure the Lord was honored in the people's eyes.

“Power and holiness” both come from the Lord.
He alone has all power in heaven and the world.
Power alone can be a danger untamed,
But with holiness linked in Jesus' name,
There are blessings abundant today coming out to men,
As when the lame man was healed back in Jerusalem.

“The Holy One and Just” was the Lord from on high;
He came here to earth to suffer and die
That through His grace we might “see and know,”
By the evidence in lives of witnesses who show
The reality of faith in the living Savior,
And enjoy salvation through His undeserved favor.

Two more links are made in verse nineteen;
“Repentance and converted” are things that are seen
When a man or woman stops to consider the facts,
That God works today the same as in the book of Acts.
When such a person stops, and repents of their sins,
Conversion takes place, and new life begins.

“After all these years Father, I can still see the tremendous benefits of the Lord's people not only saying what is right, but doing what is right. How impacting it is when reality of the new life in Christ shows itself to those who hear and look to see the expected changes. I pray today for those recently saved, that they would have the courage and avail themselves of the power of the Holy Spirit to let those changes be

seen. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Acts 3:12-26

SENT HIM TO BLESS YOU

When the two Galilean fishermen spoke to a lame man and he was immediately and completely healed, there would have been questions in the minds of those who saw the healed man leaping, walking and praising God. "How did they do that?" "Who are those men?" Peter took advantage of that unspoken curiosity to present the Gospel. He made sure the people knew they did not do this miraculous healing by their own power but by the authority and power of the Lord Jesus Christ. He told them plainly the One they had rejected and killed was the Prince of Life, the Author of Life. Their rejection as a nation was fatal but God was still gracious and each one of them could believe on, and receive the Lord Jesus as Savior and Messiah and acknowledge Him as their Lord by faith. He did not have to be seen to be believed on. They could see the evidence of the changed man right before them as proof of the power of His name.

There are times when God gives to us opportunities to speak for Him when we didn't expect it. We need the Word of God in our hearts, courage in our souls and submission to the Holy Spirit to take advantage of "teaching moments" like this. It is wise to use illustrations that people can identify with whenever we speak the truth of God. Peter certainly did that. The facts were undeniable that the Jews had turned Jesus over to Pilate because they wanted Him condemned and killed. The events surrounding the crucifixion of Christ would have been well known because they had happened in the recent past. They knew about the crucifixion but false rumors had circulated that the disciples had stolen His body. Now Peter told them again Christ was risen from among the dead. People had killed Him; God raised Him to life again; these men had personally seen Him after His resurrection. Personal testimony has value when presenting the Gospel. We are not speaking about things we have not experienced. Something that has happened to me cannot be disproved by people who were not even there. Faith in Christ changes people and like Peter and John, we need to use what we have personally experienced as proof of the authority of the Gospel message we proclaim.

Peter and John emphasized that it was God who made the change in the lame man who was healed. They took no credit for the results. Faith in His name and the authority of His Person is what is important. The name of the Lord Jesus Christ is not to be used as a charm of some kind to mysteriously bring about healing. He is the One who dealt with sin and its consequences. We need to emphasize our Lord Jesus Christ when presenting the saving work of redemption. That is what gives power and authority to our prayers.

Peter knew the prophecies of the Old Testament that were fulfilled in Christ when He was here, and Peter had confidence that all that was foretold about Him was going to be fulfilled in the future. The Jews had not been looking for a suffering Savior but for a conquering King. Peter knew this and told the people of the "times of the restitution of all things" that was yet to come. What was needed now was personal repentance and turning from sin to Christ. In our presentation of the Gospel we cannot overlook the problem and consequences of sin. The person who truly repents of sin to God and trusts Christ alone for salvation is the one whose "sins are blotted out." It is unfair, unwise and wrong to not speak of sin and warn listeners of the consequences of sins that are not forgiven. Often those who come to Christ find a sense of relief from guilt which they no longer try to hide. Such people know what "times of refreshing" are like.

In his message Peter spoke of the past, the present and the future and the place in history the Lord Jesus Christ holds. In the future when God will restore all things, the Lord Jesus will be revealed to the whole world in His glory. Judgment will be past and sin will not have a place in the kingdom of God. The message of Peter was that the Jews Messiah was Jesus. He was here and they rejected Him. But God in grace was still seeking that nation to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ when He was here. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." The prophets of the Old Testament had foretold of His coming, but even in the time of the prophets the nation had rejected the promises and prophecies of God. The nation forfeited its calling to be God's representative people through who He would be revealed to the world. Now, last of all, they had rejected and killed His Son Jesus who He had sent to bless them. From now on in Acts the emphasis gradually passes over to the Gentiles.

An understanding of the plans and purposes of God is needed when preaching the Gospel so that the hearers realize the importance of what is being proclaimed. Every one who speaks for God needs to be conscious of the importance of the Gospel message and the value of what they are doing. As a result of the Gospel being preached some will be saved by God's grace and some will be damned. When one deliberately rejects the Savior that person will be lost in hell. We should learn the lesson and value of presenting a concise, relevant message from God through His Word.

He came to bless, it was long ago predicted,
Even though many had heard Him, from them He was evicted
By way of the cross; they watched and thought He was done
Never realizing, what blessings they rejected that came through Jesus the Son.

He came to bless, and right from the start
Those who saw and believed were changed in their heart.
Some saw blessings far into the future, others right now
Before "His Son Jesus," people of faith did bow.

He came to bless; many were healed and fed.
Some were chosen to follow Him wherever He led.
They saw what He did, and from Him they daily learned
The importance of faith in Him whosoever to Him will turn.

He came to bless, even when He was condemned to die.
Because of His sacrifice for us, we can to God draw nigh.
From His death, eternal life to believers has sprung
Like multiplied seeds coming from one seed of corn.

He came to bless, and those blessings still flow.
From the Source of living waters God's grace does show.
In the fullness of new life, those who know and love Him,
Are able by faith to tell personally what He has done for them.

He came to bless, but when those blessings are refused,
The condemnation of God and hell are what people choose.
Through people who are redeemed entreaties and warnings are given.
Those who hear and believe will find endless blessings in heaven.

"Gracious Father, I pray this morning that my heart and soul will be prepared to speak Thy truth to individuals today. May I be well prepared to speak in the public meeting tonight so the people of God will know the value of love one to another. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 3:19. *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."*

TIMES OF REFRESHING.

The Jews had their chance - Messiah was offered to them.
They could have repented - opened their hearts up to Him.
Now He was gone, and in mercy God calls them again -
Through the message of the Gospel - God is speaking through men.

God wants to bless today through Jesus Christ our Lord -
We have a message for them - it is found in God's Word.
Not now to a select nation, but people in the whole world -
Are entreated to trust Him in repentance - He who saves is God.

"There is no question, O heavenly Father, these are special times. The saints all over the world are blessed with salvation and the Good News is still going out to all the nations. As we proclaim the Gospel night after night, I beseech of Thee. O God, speak loudly to these who are attending and for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ who died for them - Please make them want to be saved and save them for Thine own name sake, Amen."

Acts 3:26. *"Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."*

BLESS YOU.

Not realizing their unique privilege of being called by God to be His earthly people,
They ignored, turned away from, despised, would not receive, rejected - David's greater
Son.
He went for their hearts - but they were hardened; He appeal to their history- but they said,
"No."

"We will not have this Man to reign over us..." The One God sent to Bless them.

In His own community He was observed from day to day; subject to his parents, doing

business.
He was watched, listened to, scrutinized - He observed all the commandments of the Lord.
He could honestly say, "I do always those things that pleased the Father..." a truly holy Man.
But He who came to Bless them, was refused by His town, His friends - even His family.

His hands outstretched brought blessing to little children, the blind, the maimed, the lepers.
His hands outstretched and the word of His power brought the powers of nature under control.
His authority in the words He spoke and the actions He did, made it clear to all, "He came to Bless."
But ultimately His hands were outstretched upon the cross - nailed; bringing blessing.
Through the influences of those we knew loved us - and loved God; we knew He came to Bless us.
Through the preaching of the Word of God and clear explanations of truth - He Blessed us.
Through consistent living of those who knew Him - we watched and learned - He came to Bless us.
Through the convicting power of the Holy Spirit and the Word - we knew He came to Bless us.

The songs learned as little children, "Jesus loves me, this I know," - and we were sure He Blessed us.
Verses of scripture left their mark, "For God so loved the world..." and we knew He Blessed us.
The awakened conscience, "Thou God see-est me..." and guilt made us know He came to Bless us.
Enlightenment by the Spirit of the Word of truth - and it was clear, He came to Bless us.
I know in a personal way: through family life, church life, life-lessons taught by those who knew God;
Through watching the one I admired, through impressions given by faithful parents and other saints;
Through evidence in creation, in the Bible, in my own life; through common sense guided by God -
He came to Bless me - with life, with light, with divine influences on every hand - He Blessed me!

"Father of grace, I am very thankful to Thee for the blessings Thy grace has given to me. Each divine impression and influence; each thought and word given and received that exalted Thee has been gratefully received. I praise Thee and thank Thee for such interest in such an unworthy person. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 4:1-22

OPPOSITION

Just as the Lord Jesus had told them, opposition to the Gospel and the work of evangelism started when the apostles moved out into the community guided by the power of the Spirit. Religious leaders who knew they were responsible for the death of Christ acted in haste to stop the preaching of "Jesus and the resurrection." The Pharisees had been the major opponents to the Lord Jesus Christ when He was here. Now the Sadducees became the leaders of the opposition because one of their fundamental beliefs was threatened. They did not believe in the resurrection from the dead. These were powerful men who had wealth and were the majority group in the Sanhedrin. They were considered the intellectual leaders because of their humanist teaching. We have the same kind of people today who because of their education and rejection of faith as a real guiding principle in life, will mock, repudiate and challenge with open outspoken opposition, any who confess to faith in the risen Christ as the only way to heaven. You will find modern Sadducees are people who anchor television programs, teach our children and young people in schools and universities, and take places of leadership so they can change the laws and the moral principles of the nation. What we are up against in evangelism today is nothing new.

Our greatest influence in such people is the calm, contented assurance of people whose lives have been changed. There is a peace and happiness in spite of opposition that frustrates those who think they have the answers to the issues of life based on science and mans' opinions. When such opposition arises, our message needs to be consistent. It would be wrong to change the truth of God in any way to suit the opinions or sensitivities of people. The death, burial and resurrection of Christ leaves no room for any private interpretation. Peter risked persecution and rejection, and was put in prison for insisting there was no other way of salvation. There is "none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

No other religions tell us what we ought to be but Christ transforms us into what He intends us to be. Other religions make people aware of their needs. Christ meets our needs and forgives our sins. Peter did not take a defensive position but as the Lord Jesus did when He was under opposition, Peter went on the offensive right away.

Those Jewish leaders were very disturbed and unhappy with two "unlearned and ignorant men" who took control of the meeting by teaching them what they should have known. The keystone of the arch of truth who they should have received, was "the head of the corner" (the keystone of the arch). The name Jesus Christ of Nazareth was again proclaimed as the ultimate authority. 5000 adults had been added to the 120 and the 3000 who were saved previously. The One the leadership had sacrificed "for the good of the nation" now had followers who were impacting the people in the same way their Lord did because of the power of His name. There was undeniable healing, there were thousands who believed on Him and were joined to the few who had followed Him. The position and power of those leaders was in jeopardy and they knew it. Their reputation was at stake under the bold courage of those men who were speaking for God so articulately and giving the Gospel message to them personally.

Part of the impact on those leaders and people of that day, and the leaders and people of our day, is the conviction of believers that the Lord Jesus Christ only is the Savior of the world. No one else is His equal nor can give eternal life and salvation from sin. The respect and reverence for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and for Him personally, in our life and attitude is a powerful testimony to what we have to say. Whether people choose to believe or choose to refuse does not change the undeniable facts of the changed lives of those who believe in Jesus. Minds may remain closed but by prayer, continually presenting the Gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit, hard hearts can be softened and closed doors and minds can be opened.

It is a fact that when we share our faith in Christ with others, many will feel uncomfortable. Some people will not only reject the message, but will also reject the messenger. That is to be expected. The same Holy Spirit who confounded and convicted the Sanhedrin, used those who were available and filled them with His power to reveal the solution for sin to those same people. Whether they accepted the truth that was told them and the Savior who was presented, was up to them. When the opinions of men, or even the laws of expediency that have been imposed on the people, are contrary to the will of God, we are obligated, no matter what the consequences are to obey God. Those men were told by the risen Lord Jesus Christ to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. That still must be done by us. Our orders come from the highest of all courts - the court of divine authority, commission and approval. The powers that be are ordained of God, but when they usurp His authority, our obligation is to God in spite of whatever opposition may come against us.

I wonder do they really know who they are up against
When decisions are made to oppose God's will, it doesn't make any sense
Those who oppose divine initiatives have absolutely no chance to win
Against the Mighty Judge of all who knows every secret sin.

I wonder if people really think they will come on top at the end
Men are so helpless against the forces of Him who controls sea and wind.
Yet for some reason they deny His existence and think they are in control
Until some event happens to awaken them to the need of their eternal soul.

I wonder if some think if they can humiliate one enough, that person will no longer preach
It is possible they have never understood or been willing to hear what the scriptures teach
Perhaps they deliberately stay away so their consciences won't be awakened
And then a storm or flood or disease makes their opinion forever shaken.

I wonder when a person is on their bed at night if they are concerned about what happens
next
Maybe they are drawn in the depths of their soul to remember some scripture text
In the past, they had learned from faithful parents, truths they have long rejected
And they begin to think about Jesus and the salvation they have willfully neglected.

I wonder when people get together with friends to drink, and joke and laugh
If they think there is hope for some meaning in life, or if they think all hope has passed
Is there an urge deep within their soul to kneel down and really try to pray?
I wonder if when they are in such a state, they want to sincerely know what to say.

I wonder if some word they have heard long ago will shed on their dark soul some light
Would it be possible they are willing to surrender and no longer against God will fight?

If they lay down weapons of rebellion and submit to the truth that in them hides
I know God is there to bring conviction and the commitment to go against the world's
tides.

I wonder if there are those right here God is bringing to the place of repentance.
And they are considering as I write these words, that Christ bore sin's awful sentence
I wonder if the Spirit of God is using some memory or some spoken word
That will bring them in child-like faith to Christ, where they will accept Him as Savior and
Lord.

**"Father, may I keep in my mind throughout this day the thought that some word
spoken in fellowship with Thee may be the difference between life and death to some
sinner. Help me to guard my words today. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,
Amen."**

Acts 4:10. *"Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye
crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand before you whole."*

THE NAME.

There is authority in some names, be it of a man or a nation.
Usually it is of a government or someone of high station.
The name is of use only to make some designation -
For the name identifies a system or a man's reputation.

The name of the Lord Jesus gave full authorization
To the acts of the apostles and of the saints' congregation.
There was power in His name at the Church's initiation,
And His name gave to believers, full recognition.

Those who looked on in fear were filled with trepidation,
Because the impact of His name was in every communication
That the early Church made when speaking of God's salvation,
To the ones who were responsible for Christ's crucifixion.

The power of His name was manifest when the Spirit brought conviction,
And the preachers named "Jesus of Nazareth" by way of distinction.
Witnessing of Him brought the truth of God to fruition -
Through Jesus alone, can heaven be your final destination.

The witnesses to Him knew the truth of His bodily resurrection.
They knew Him as Lord, and the Almighty God of all creation.
Their lives lived before others gave clear manifestation;
Jesus Himself was the theme of their Gospel presentation.

He has been challenged by skeptics and severe examination.
He has manifested Himself in many ways and times of visitation.
He has never refused those who come with sincere determination,
And willingly saves every one who accepts His invitation.

**"The name of the Lord Jesus Christ, heavenly Father, still brings a thrill of gratitude
when I hear it spoken. It is sweet to my ear, balm to my soul, peace to my heart - puts
grace in my lips, joy to my mind, visions in my eyes, lightness to my steps,
enthusiasm to my hands. I love the name and Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."**

Acts 4:23-37

ASSEMBLED TOGETHER

When the Lord's people are under pressure from the "powers that be," the "powers of darkness" or those
who want them to conform to the wishes of the people, united prayer is the action that needs to be taken.
Even as those earlier believers prayed together, there more than just unity in presence, there was unity in
praise to God. Their reverential address to God impresses us with the fact that prayer was no casual matter
to them. There was not a lot of redundancy in repeating God's name as they prayed, or in the words they
used or in the way they addressed God. There was an awareness of the greatness of God and the power of
God. They also recognized that in God's sovereign will, He doesn't necessarily remove the problems we are
facing. In the unified prayer of these new believers, they were asking for help for themselves to deal with the
problem, not necessarily remove it.

The problems that arise in Christian testimony are allowed by God for a reason. We may not know at the time what that reason is. It is enough for us to know that God's "hand and counsel" has already planned the outcome of the event. They knew now it was by the "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified and slain. The outcome of that has been countless blessings that are still going on in the world today. When the apostle Paul was afflicted with a "thorn in the flesh," this was so God's strength would be displayed by his weakness. To follow a set pattern in verbal usage when we pray is not taught in scripture. To acknowledge the holiness, greatness and goodness of God is. It is important that we do not use vain repetition that indicates a lack of thought and exercise in prayer.

Not all prayers are answered in the way we expect. When God answered those believers who were gathered together, there was a physical affirmation that He heard when the place where they had gathered together to pray was shaken. If they were in the temple court it would have affected many beside themselves as those who came and went saw and heard the saints in prayer. If it was in some building there was evidence that God was speaking to His people. Wherever it was, the filling of the Spirit was obvious. For Peter, this was at least the third time he was filled with the Spirit teaching us that such filling is for a specific work at a specific time, not permanently, and is given to enable us to do or say what God wants and is beyond our natural ability.

Spiritual boldness is not reckless in any way. It is not some urgent impulse to drive through obstacles like a bulldozer. It involves the desire for courage that is given by the Holy Spirit. It is courage under divine control that takes advantage of opportunities when they arise. Boldness does not mean we are immune to the fear of rejection or the embarrassment that may come when we are denounced publicly. The response on the part of people will not always be favorable but that is to be expected in anything we may seek to do that is contrary to public opinion. Boldness may involve doing what is right when others are doing what is wrong. Spiritual boldness is needed when we speak up for the Lord while others are demeaning Him and His name. Boldness from God enables us in spite of our fears, to move forward even when we don't know what the outcome will be. There will always be differences of opinions and personality conflicts, but when we are unified in purpose in spite of those differences, and there is love for God, for His people, for lost souls and for the Gospel - those things will not hinder our commitment to be loyal to Him and press on with His work. Unity in the things of God has the potential to allow us to do great things for God.

Great grace among people of divergent personalities and backgrounds enables great power in witnessing for the Lord Jesus. The personal awareness of God at work in my life will lead me to be conscious of needs in the lives of my brothers and sisters in Christ. Unity of spirit leads to unity of purpose. Unity of purpose leads to unity in sharing possessions to meet the real needs of others. Some needs may be of physical things to be supplied to help others through crisis times. Other needs may be to supply emotional support when a brother or sister is passing through the deep waters of personal trials. An awareness of what is going on around us in the lives of others is only possible if we are unified and close enough to be of "one accord and one mind." Unity and generosity go together. Those believers in the early church were not commanded to give everything for the common good. They gave what they had from willing hearts to meet the needs as they saw them. It was not a requirement in order to be in the fellowship of the assembly, nor was it to be required as evidence of salvation. This was not the first act of communism as many school teachers tell their students today. This was a voluntary act of genuine caring for the needy that was not imposed on the saints. The distribution of such goods is not an easy task nor a simple matter because not everyone has the same degree of appreciation. The apostles did this at first because they were recognized as leaders and were the ones responsible for the work in general. Lessons for us are to learn the value of unified prayer when we assemble together. There is great power when the Holy Spirit fills a company of saints when they assemble together. There is great grace manifested through God's people toward each other when we are assembled together. Needs of others are met when we assemble together.

When the people of God assemble together, there is much divergency
But the amazing evidence of grace is manifested when there is unity.
Each one is different with a variety of talents and the unity of God-given gifts
That when put together with those of others has power to everyone bless.

When prayer is made there is a common purpose that only when together is filled
Alone we are as weak as water on the ground, but together our fears are stilled
Because we know the unifying power does not come when the votes are counted
But from the Holy Spirit who gives victory when opposition against us is mounted.

The gathering of saints to some people seems to be quite unnecessary
Their weakness leads to coldness of heart when at the world's fire they too long tarry
In the gathered company of God's people, there is a warmth that is so real

The cold in heart are warmed by grace, and the hurting souls are healed.

The gathered saints know what is needed before many minutes are passed
And needs of others can be supplied before any hard questions are asked
There is a sense of unity that empowers and cannot really be denied
So the awareness of the solution is found, when the problem we do not hide.

When gathered together to preach the Word, one spokesman speaks for all
Each one knows what needs to be said when someone privately chooses to call
Seeking answers of peace for a soul that is deeply troubled by sin
And even at the moment we are alone, we are speaking for all of them.

The gathering together of God's people is even more important now
As we approach the time when before the Lord Jesus every knee shall bow
We need the fellowship of each other as we go upward against the flow
Of those who oppose the Lord Himself, that we God's great grace can show.

"Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for the gathering of Thy people here who are coming together each night to hear Thy Word. Grant Thy servant the right message to speak this day. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 4:29. *"Grant to thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word."*

BOLDNESS.

Speaking the word of God is a most awesome responsibility. That means that we speak for God; in God's place; in the way that God would speak it; in the tone of voice that God would use. Even the inflections of the words used would have to be what God would use. The visage of the face, the rise and fall of the sounds, the use of the hands, the expressions of the eyes and mouth, the tilt of the head would all need to be like God – godly.

Do I dare to take such a task on? Is it presumption to think that I might speak God's word? How can such a frail, mortal creature go to such lengths as to boldly make pronouncements that what I am saying is God's word?

The only way I could even consider that what I say is God's word, is that I have God's actual words to compare it with. Thank God, we are not left without this guidance. We have the written scriptures contained within the Bible; we have the Holy Spirit within to use our mouths to speak the words of God boldly. So, thankfully, we are not left on our own to try to make what we speak, legitimately "God's word." We have the real thing and with confidence and boldness, know that God is the One who grants to His servants, boldness to speak His word without fear.

"I am so grateful Father, that You have given evidence that what is being spoken is truly Thy word, not some fabrication of my own making. Keep me conscious every time I speak, that this is God's word for the moment to these people. Then, by Thy power, I can speak boldly. Amen."

Acts 4: 33. *"And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all."*

WITNESSES.

It changed everything! That familiar face they saw, was the face of the One with whom they had become so used to seeing. It was the face that looked up at Mary and Joseph when He was only a baby. It was the same face that Simeon and Anna looked at in the temple and caused them great joy. People by the thousands looked at that face until He was recognized wherever He went. The apostles had watched His expressions change from compassion on the multitudes to anger at the desecration of the temple. They had seen His delighted face as He blessed the children and had seen tears coming down that face at the grave of a dead friend. They had seen the whole range of emotions that were caused by human frailty and failings of others cross the face of their Master and Lord.

But something is different now. They had seen His face in repose at His death on the cross. They may even have watched as Joseph and Nicodemus took His body off the cross and saw the linen cloth placed over His face before the stone was rolled across the opening of the tomb. More importantly, they looked and saw Him three days later in their midst in the upper room. They "looked upon Him," on the mountain in Galilee and then had watched His face as He gave the final words to them before He returns again to take them to the

Father's house. Looking up they saw Him, until a cloud covered the face and form of the One, they knew was "alive from the dead."

Now as a result of seeing the living, resurrected Lord Jesus, they themselves were objects of opposition and interest. People were looking upon this group of people because there was great power in their words and actions. There was great grace on every one of them as their obvious concern for others led them to not claim any of their hard-earned possessions was his or her own. An awareness of the Lord Jesus Christ with them and the Holy Spirit in them, made them and their life-style attractive even to those in opposition. They gave witness to the resurrection with power that could not be ignored.

I wonder if the assurance I have of Christ being alive is in any way attractive to those who know me. I wonder if I am able to create any sort of interest on the part of others in my Savior because of what they might hear from me or see in me. Is there any real power? Is there any grace that shows? Or am I easy to ignore?

"Father of all grace and power: I really want to be like those brothers and sisters of mine who never got over their enthusiasm for the benefits of the Gospel. I want - I need that kind of power to be effective in some small way. I pray that the kind of grace they had, would somehow be seen in this naturally "graceless" person. In the name of Him who they never got used to. Amen."

Acts 5:1-16

WARNINGS

Some people today present God in the Old Testament scriptures differently than God in the New Testament. But this is wrong. Warnings about the holiness of God came in many different ways to those believers of the Old Testament times. Moses was told to take his shoes off because "the ground on which thou standest is holy ground." The children of Israel were warned to stay away from the "holy mount" lest they die. Joshua had to put one shoe off when he was in the presence of God. Strangely today many think God has changed and we do not need to worry if we dishonor Him, disobey Him or neglect Him and His Word. Some will say, He is a God of love. He would not punish His children." This indicates an opinion of God that He is not much more than a kindly grandfather who is very sentimental when it comes to His family, and they can get away with whatever they want to do. God has not changed. God is the same in the New Testament as He was in the Old, but "his mercy endured for ever."

Right near the beginning of the church age when the foundation of the apostles and prophets were still the authoritative voices among the early church, a warning is clearly given lest we think the holiness of God no longer counts among His people. The generosity of Barnabas and the respect he had among the people is contrasted by the deception of Ananias and Sapphira. They didn't have to sell their possession and give the money to the apostles. They didn't have to turn their money over to the apostles to use for the common good. But to pretend to give all the proceeds so they might be more highly thought of, while at the same holding back the rest, was dishonesty with covetousness at the root. Covetousness in any form is a moral sin that can easily and quickly affect a whole assembly of God's people. "He did it so why can't I?" "They got away with that so we will do the same." Covetousness is like an infectious, communicable disease and the potential evil that comes to the whole assembly of saints can quickly get out of control destroying the testimony. Spiritual discipline is the only way such a sin can be dealt with. Perhaps more than any other moral sin, covetousness can quickly change the whole character of a local church of God.

To deceive God's people is bad enough, but to seek to deceive God by lying to the Holy Spirit at the same time, quickly destroys our testimony to the saving grace of God. That first church learned in a hurry that our God has not changed nor will He ever change. His holiness is not compromised in any way by His love, grace and mercy. Sin is still sin and God has not changed His attitude toward it. He hates sin because it is contrary to all that He is and all that He expects of His children. Even though God's grace saves us when we put our faith in Christ alone for salvation, His holiness and righteousness remain fully intact. Others died in Corinth because they did not recognize the importance of holiness when they partook of the Lord's Supper. Righteous judgment on His own children seems unfair to those who only have the name of being a Christian. In this day of so much counterfeit Christianity, "easy believeism" and the desire to "feel good" about everything, people seem to think they can escape the consequences of their sin as they go on doing unscriptural practices in the name of God. We all need to remember "Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth." Many think God has gone soft on sin because they get away with things that seem much worse than what Ananias and Sapphira did. Either they are not saved at all, or God in mercy is giving them time "to repent and do the first works" that are motivated by love for God and for His people.

With such a warning having been given to people concerning dishonesty, why are people attracted to the Gospel and the truth of God? When the Holy Spirit is not grieved nor quenched by God's people, there is an attractiveness to the truth that is way beyond the outward trappings of religious activity. We need to remember the value of sincerity, honesty, unity and generosity that is seen in the lives of believers who love the Lord and obey His Word. Many things are being done today to attract people to attend church services. Music is louder and longer, programs for people of every age and social group are initiated to "meet the need of the individual." Many forget the church is the dwelling place of the living God. Instead of the emphasis being placed on what pleases people and makes them comfortable "where they are," we need to be reminded that obeying God, and doing things His way for His glory, is our responsibility. When the focus is on people rather than God, a local congregation becomes a social service, with the building the assembly uses becoming a social center, to meet social needs. We do need to "do good unto all men," but we also need to realize the local church is "the house of God" and we are responsible to "behave ourselves in the house of God."

God's power was working through His people in the early church and signs were obvious to the Jews that affirmed what the apostles preached publicly and taught privately. Miracles were done that showed the power of God that was seen in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, was continuing through the lives and ministry of those who followed Him. Now it is our turn to demonstrate the holiness, grace, mercy and love of God so that the people of our place and generation will be saved.

It is quite possible to forget how holy our God is
When we look around and see all that is being done.
For some reason He continues extending His grace
Towards those who even deny His Son.
But let me never forget God is eternally the same,
In Him there is no shadow caused by turning.
There are things people do when they dishonor His name
That are written down for our warning and learning.

Dishonesty is so common people seem not to think
That it is very important or even so bad.
With not much more than a thought, they are on the brink
Of righteous judgment, and will soon earnestly wish they had
Paid attention to conscience and simple morality
That is in place so that we do what is right.
When it is too late, they will then face the reality
That every act we do is done in God's sight.

These warnings are given that we will not do
Those things that are designed to deceive.
Our commitment should be that to God we are true
So that other people will on Him believe.
Warnings are for us, but also that through us
Others will learn the Holy God sees every action.
Perhaps it will lead them to with their heart trust
In Him who gives to us eternal satisfaction.

"Holy God, my Father, Thy Word has given serious warnings to me to never pretend one thing and the reality be something else. May I have a willing heart and mind to be led and guided to speak the truth from a good and honest heart, that others also might experience the benefits of Thy grace. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 5:11. *"And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things."*

GREAT FEAR.

What has happened here?
These called out ones are filled with fear?
There is a great work that is being done,
And yet fear has come on each and every one.
There are lessons to be learned we have overlooked -
Some things we can't know - so steps the Spirit took
To bring plainly to the minds of all His saints -
"Do not pretend to God - He knows each step you take."
To say one thing and have actually done another -
To God it is out in the open - nothing is undercover.

So I learn from Thee Holy Spirit, to not tempt God -
For I will lose all in an instant - what could have been good.

“Holy God, may I never think I can get away with some private plan or scheme. May I always be aware that my life is lived before Thee, and men may never know my motives for doing something. I am acutely cognizant of the fact my thoughts and intents are not hidden from Thee. I bow my heart in reverence, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Acts 5:17-42

WITNESSING IN SPIE OF OPPOSITION

The power of the Holy Spirit filling visionary believers to do the work God sent them to accomplish is not easily stopped. The Sadducees in the early days were so angered against those who were making an impact of the whole city of Jerusalem by preaching Jesus and the resurrection, and their message was so confirmed by miraculous signs, that the apostles were imprisoned. Plain preaching of the Gospel by faithful men whose lives back up their message, will still be opposed by organized religion and materialistically minded people. Truth exposes a lie. Compassion for souls exposes greed and covetousness. "If God be for us, who can be against us." Faith in God and commitment to His service does not mean that there will not be opposition. It does let us know and makes clear in times of opposition that the antagonism of some does not hinder the work of God. When under the pressure of opposition, we get the right perspective of who God is, the power of the Gospel, the world's opinion of God and His Word, who sinners are and their limitations - and who we are, witnesses for the Almighty God.

Prison is not an obstacle for God. He used those bars that men thought would stop the voices of the apostles to reveal the power of God and the impotency of opposition against God's Gospel. The Gospel seems to flourish under the pressures of opposition. The angel didn't just free the apostles but he gave instructions from the throne of God to go again and preach the Gospel. Those faithful men did not hesitate to be on the job at the break of day speaking the words of salvation to those who came early to the temple to worship and pray. When the Lord rose from the dead, the angel of the Lord rolled away the stone from the door of the sepulcher and the soldiers "became as dead men." This time the angel opened the prison doors, brought the apostles out, closed the doors behind them and the guards outside the doors were like men who were blind and deaf because they did not see or hear a thing. When we can see people as the Lord Jesus sees them, we see ourselves as God sees us - as witnesses for Him. When we are willing laborers in the harvest of the Lord - God can use us in ways we never dreamed of.

The calling of God supersedes every other consideration in life. The apostles did just what they were told and were speaking openly to the people without offense or conflict. But the world and authorities who support that system always have, and always will see the message of God as a threat to them. They consider their authority supreme and will challenge divine authority in their own self-importance. There will inevitably be times when we must decide who we will obey - God or men. Our choice is already made for us. "We ought to obey God rather than men."

No matter what will be the outcome of an event, we must put God's will first. Our obligation to obey Him is our priority. Even in the court room, Peter and the apostles agreed and were united in their public testimony as to their responsibility to the "Prince and Savior." Wisely and kindly they told how this great blessing for Israel came through the One they represented as witnesses. When the conscience of people is awakened, the responses usually are anger or acquiescence, and sometimes indifference to a seared conscience. Unless there is some person like Gamaliel who can calm troubled, convicted, ungodly people with simple counsel, when under opposition the best thing we can do is wait, and then trust God to bring about the results that He desires.

Being beaten for doing what God intended them to do, brought joy to those men, rather than self-pity or anger. To be opposed for doing what we know is right is really a positive outcome rather than a negative one. There was no animosity demonstrated, no retaliation of any kind threatened against the persecutors. Instead there was a calm assurance and joy of knowing they were publicly identified with their Lord and Savior. This event in no way turned them aside from the objective of furthering the Gospel. House meetings were used as a way to spread the good news to those who would listen. Whether the numbers are large or small we should use whatever we have at our disposal to fulfill the mandate we have been given by our Lord. In spite of what people say or believe as an opinion, we need to follow the apostolic example of making it plain that we are speaking for God when we present scriptural truth. The Lord Jesus Christ is to be the central theme of our message. The importance of repentance toward God and faith in Christ must be emphasized before indicating the assurance of forgiveness of sins. Too often the problem of sin is only briefly addressed and forgiveness is treated as some light-weight matter. Forgiveness of sins is granted to

those who come by faith to accept what the grace of God has provided at the high cost of the life of Christ and His death on the cross to make full payment for our transgressions.

Let us share our faith, live as our Lord intended, preach the Word, teach it privately and be willing to accept whatever opposition that comes as a reason for rejoicing. Before long we may be reduced to meeting only in homes as a way of reaching people as the opposition increases.

There is no reason to be surprised when people oppose
Because when God's truth exposes man's lies
Those who don't want the Savior will seek to depose
Believers who their Lord Jesus will not deny.
It is up to us to continue to be faithful
To the One who gave us this charge.
The attitude toward the Lord by those who are grateful
Will make a mark of honor and rejoicing over each scar.

It goes with the territory of each faithful witness
That we will be opposed by the powers that be.
When opposition against the Gospel begins to press
Our best course of action is to wait and see
How God chooses to resolve in His all-knowing way
What seems to hinder the work we are to do.
There is no need to fear what people might say,
We just need to His will to be true.

Pressure to yield to the majority is not always right
When the majority denies what is God's revealed will.
Remember the world's darkness hates heaven's light
The unjust are unjust and filthy remain filthy still.
To compromise righteousness and holiness is always wrong
Even though we are pressured to be compliant.
By the power of the Spirit we can remain strong,
And by God's grace we won't always have to be silent.

"Righteous Father, the opposition we once experienced here is passed, at least openly. There is a new kind of opposition now. It is the lethargy and complacency of Thy people that comes with being accepted. In Thy mercy to us Thy people, stir us again to see the value of who we are and what we represent. Lift our eyes above the well-wishes of the world so we might receive Thy "Well done." In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 5:41. *"...Rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name."*

COUNTED WORTHY.

It is not usually considered a cause for rejoicing when we are put to shame. If shame is caused by bad conduct, it is a cause for embarrassment. If shame comes from bad company, that too is reason to bow our heads in humiliation. But if shame is caused because of our identification with our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, it is a cause for great rejoicing! There is no higher honor than to be linked with Him in any way. It is a unique blessing to be publicly noted as an associate of the Lord Himself. How great a cause for joy it is to be called to suffer for such a noble association!

"It is with a sense of humility Father, that I am glad to be called a Christian. That's how the people around recognize me. It is with deeper humility that I feel unworthy of being called brother, by some of the choicest people on earth. But to be linked with the Lord Jesus Christ and through Him, to made a child of God and placed as a son - I can only look up from the depths of my unworthiness and worship! In the name of the "Beloved" who has made me accepted, Amen."

Acts 6.

SERVING

Leadership in the assemblies of God's people is not based on popularity or natural talents and skills developed in the work-place. In the work of administration of God's things there are gifts given by God to be used for the benefit of others - not self-serving. People who are spiritually mature need to recognize the needs of the moment so that when issues arise that can lead to problems, these can be "nipped in the bud." Spirit-led self-control helped the apostles to look calmly at a potential problem and deal with it by God-given

wisdom. Serving (ministering) is not some easy task to be done by just anyone. There are often those who think they are being treated unfairly when there was no such intention on the part of those who serve. Whether it is service to meet the needs of the body or to meet the needs of the soul, both need reputable people who are honest, spiritual and wise to respond to the work at hand. Whether one is called to a leadership role or a ministering work, we need the filling of the Holy Spirit.

The apostles were right in not neglecting the Word of God and prayer. It is not possible for a few to do everything for the many. It is for this very reason divine Persons have given gifts to the church. Those who were responsible for the teaching and preaching showed their approval and fellowship with those who designated as deacons to deal with other parts of the work. The work of deacons has a very large scope of responsibility. It involves both material and spiritual service as we read about ministry through the New Testament. The word "deacon" and "minister" come from the same word and have the same meaning. In whatever service one does for the Lord the listed qualifications of "honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom" does apply. No work we can do or are willing to do is insignificant.

As the number of saved people increased, and "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith," the need of teaching the doctrines of the new covenant became more imperative. Often people who are saved by God's grace from some religious or denominational background, bring with them some vestiges of what they followed in the past. The Jewish believers would be inclined to still adhere to the legal demands of the law. Hellenists would bring with them some of the humanistic tendencies they had thought were important. The apostles by virtue of being in the foundation of the work had to carefully teach orally the mind of God as revealed by the Holy Spirit. They had the Old Testament types and shadows. They had the historical books, the prophets and the psalms, so they had to use them to show the fulfillment of types, shadows and prophecies in the coming of Christ. Then they needed to apply them to the present development of the New Testament church so the saints would know where they fit in this new work God was doing. He was making of both Jews and Gentiles, "one new man (body)."

People who are trusted and faithful in one work are often given more to do. Usually if you want to get something done, you look for a busy person, not someone who is just lazily hanging around without showing any initiative. The Spirit of God used Stephen to do more than serve tables. He used Stephen to also serve the Word of God and reach out to people in general with the Gospel. A person committed to the Word of God will be committed to the people of God and to the Gospel of God. Stephen was willing to get involved. he was willing to associate with people. And he was willing not only to do the physical work of serving tables, but to go on further with the great commission. Disciples today who serve the Lord will witness for Christ. They will also be committed to establish the believers in the faith and in the Word of God. Training others so there will not be a vacuum left when older saints move on to other work is part of the responsibilities we have.

It may be that former slaves who were freed formed their own synagogue in Jerusalem. It is not uncommon for groups to arise calling themselves "Christian," to have an unknown agenda they are following. Such a diverse group of discontented people will often misrepresent the teaching of scripture in order to forward their own personal opinions. The people of the synagogue of the Libertines were not above lying to get their agenda heard. The accusations against Stephen were false but they were used by Satan to seek to stop the mouth of Stephen. We must never turn aside from the work to which we have been called, and we must remain consistent in the message we proclaim to the people. Stephen knew what he was talking about when he was called to the council. The Spirit of God had prepared him. But it was also obvious to them all that something was special about Stephen. May the uniqueness and reality of our faith be obvious to those around us.

Acts 6:5. *"Men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom..."*

HONEST.

Some things are better able to be seen rather than heard. An honest report is of great value. In order to have people give an honest report about me, they have to have observed me in a lot of different aspects of my life: business, family, marriage, church and community life are all observable by people even when I don't know it is happening. In order to be able to be used for God in service, there has to be a good reputation from without.

God knows when one is full of the Holy Spirit. A person full of the Holy Spirit can be trusted with very difficult situations. To deal with sensitive issues among God's people is a very touchy responsibility; there are so many conflicting points of view about the same matter usually. May I always be a willing and available tool for the Holy Spirit to use without question.

Wisdom is really my responsibility. If I am teachable, available, prayerful and a willing listener; I can perhaps gain some wisdom and insight that God can use for His glory.

Such men as those early deacons, have given us a clear understanding as to what God wants in those who serve Him by serving His people.

There were seven things which characterized Stephen. Faith – He was full of faith, v.5. People who have experienced God working in their lives – know God's blessings. People of faith can trust God without question – even in difficulties. People of faith can rest in God when nothing is happening – even in waiting. The Holy Spirit was working through Stephen – He was full of the Holy Ghost, v.5. That meant he was available, ready, and willing to do what God wanted, and by the Spirit's power, Stephen was a wise servant, v.3; who was used to perform miracles as a sign of divine authority v.8. He was also an articulate evangelist, v.10, who people listened to and responded to. Stephen was also a man through whom the power of God was evident – He was full of power, v.8. God's power was working through him. He was a powerful speaker who had powerful logic when presenting God's truth. He also had a powerful personality that was used under the control of the Spirit of God. The wisdom the Holy Spirit gave Stephen was irresistible, v.10. In order to divide property and food for the people and to be a sensitive administrator, a man must be a person known for integrity, patience and wisdom. Stephen was a man of God given wisdom. Energy, spiritual energy, v.10, is greatly needed in the face of lies, opposition and antagonism. This requires one who is not easily moved but has the spiritual energy to withstand the pressure that comes upon one who is placed by God in a public position. And Stephen was also a man of steadfastness – he ceased not, v.13. He didn't quit when opposition arose. He knew he was doing what God wanted and he was not going to be intimidated into silence. Effective communication is not easy under serious, life-threatening opposition. In the council chambers with antagonism evident all around him – his face shone, v.15. One of the ways the reality of who we are shows itself is through the face and hands. These are silent testimonies that add weight to the words we speak. Facial expressions and motions of the hands can add a powerful emphasis to the message we give and the importance we believe the message contains.

"Lord, if there is some way I can be more like them, then perhaps You will be able to use me in Thy holy service. They served You by serving the people around them. I want to serve You by serving people around me. Amen"

Acts 6:10. *"And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake."*

NOT ABLE TO RESIST.

To know what to say to inquirers is not always an easy task.
When people come to question you, you're not sure what they will ask.
Wisdom coming from God is what we need the most -
A scriptural reply can often bring doubts to a close.

But more is needed to really convince a skeptical hearer.
They want the truth 'tis true, but one's spirit it makes it clearer
Then what you say, though it's biblical, and plainly states the facts,
It is far more acceptable through my spirit and how I act.

Some will be convinced by those two means alone -
The wisdom and the spirit of a Christian who is a faithful one,
Makes it hard to resist though the truth you may not know -
These characteristics in a faithful saint publicly will show.

Faith and power too can be reflected in some other ways -
What a person believes comes out through what he has to say.
Power is often seen after the words are said and done -
The event is usually passed before we can judge just what's been won.

"O God, is it possible that there is something here I am missing altogether. I search for wisdom in the scriptures and ask for it in prayer. Sometimes I think Thou art speaking through me and yet the results seem so small. Is there something missing in my spirit that makes me such an unprofitable servant? O God, help me, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 7.

THE VALUE OF HISTORY

The Gospel often takes root in places prepared by the blood of martyrs. Before people can *give* their lives for the Gospel, they must *live* their lives for the Gospel. One way God trains His servants, is to place them in insignificant positions. Deacons were chosen for their integrity, sensitivity and wisdom from God. Stephen was both a good administrator and powerful speaker. He was the first to be put to death for his faith. How many risks do we take in being Jesus' followers? Would we be willing to die for Him? Are we really willing to live for Him?

Stephen's message had three main points: Israel's history is the history of God's acts in the world. People worshipped God before there was a temple. God doesn't live in man-made temples. Jesus' death was just one more example of Israel's rebellion and rejection. Circumcision was the sign of a covenant between God and Abraham, and then Israel. God had always kept His side of the promise, but Israel had failed again and again to uphold its end of the covenant. Even in Stephen's day, they still failed to obey God. The people's hearts were far away from God. Their lack of faith and lack of obedience meant they had failed in the covenant. Stephen's message of review of Jewish history gives a clear testimony to God's faithfulness and sovereignty. In spite of what happens, however confusing, we must remember...God is in control--nothing surprises Him; this world is not all there is--it will pass away--but God is eternal; God is just, and He will make things right--punishing the wicked and rewarding the faithful; God wants to use you to make a difference in the world like those of whom Stephen spoke: Joseph, Moses, Stephen.

To many young people the three-dimensional effect of the study of history gives us, is a waste of their time. They would rather live in the one-dimensional lifestyle where "eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die," allows them to ignore the lessons learned by others. Those lessons are "for our learning and admonition," and can help us to avoid the mistakes made by others who have lived before us. When Stephen gave his discourse on the history of the Jewish nation, he made the listeners aware of the fact that God was involved in the history of mankind long before Israel was a recognized nation. He also made them realize they were in the same march of history and were making the same mistakes their fathers made before them. God appeared to Abraham when he was still half-way from Ur to Canaan. The God of glory appeared to Abraham when he began his life for God to give him directions and assure him the life of faith was the right one.

In Stephen's summary of their history he reminds them that the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses during his life for God. The conclusion of the whole historical event was happening right there when the Son of God appeared to Stephen standing on the right hand of God to receive Stephen at the end of his life. The whole of history of that nation was connecting links of people living at different times: Abraham at the beginning of the nation and early in his life, Moses in the middle of the life of the nation and the middle of his own life, and now Stephen when God was about to turn to the Gentiles and at the end of Stephen's life. The history of God's dealings with men was unfolding right before them and they didn't get it. To Abraham the sight of God gave him incentive to live a life of faith. To Moses the angel of God reminded him in the middle of his life of his commission and responsibility to lead God's people by faith. To Stephen when he saw the Lord standing, he was assured the living Lord who he served by faith was waiting to receive him at the end of his life.

So right at the beginning of Stephen's discourse he took control of the whole event, not by being defensive, but by going on the offensive and speaking of God's dealings with their nation. He didn't waste time defending himself of the false accusations they made, but throughout his speech he answered the charges of blasphemy against him concerning Moses, God, the temple and the law. He did this by showing how the nation of Israel, of whom they were representatives by their own words, time and time again had failed to uphold the terms of the covenant they had made with God. Others had done it in the past and these people were doing the same thing now. God had always faithfully kept His promises and His side of the covenant. Israel did not even though they maintained some of the forms without the reality.

It is possible to do the right things and still be away from God in our hearts. Some of what they did was right but they added to it forms of their own making. We can do the same and that negates the right things into mindless traditions, even though it looks right. The Jews still circumcise their boy babies but their heart is still far from God. It is possible to eat the Lord's Supper and not discern the Lord's body and blood. We can go through baptism with no intention of walking in newness of life. Even prayer can become such a habit that we repeat the same words and requests over and over without any real thought being given to the Person we are making requests of. The people Stephen was speaking to had learned history but not the lessons.

All through Stephen's challenging discourse he spoke of the faithfulness of God and His divine authority. In spite of what they did or did not do, God remained committed to them. He gave them the law as a sign of the agreement made but they broke that law right from the beginning, and continued to disobey God as their Sovereign. Idolatry even came in among God's people before they had reached Canaan after the exodus

from Egypt. Stephen had been charged with blasphemy against the temple. The Jews had been using the temple for business purposes and yet were more committed to the temple than they were to God. The temple was not much more than a place to make money to many of them.

The dwelling place of God is not limited to buildings, denominations or places we decide. He has chosen to live in the body of Christ at His incarnation. He dwells in the Church of which He is the Head. The local assembly of those who gather out to Him is His dwelling place, "the house of God." He even chooses to dwell in the bodies of believers in Christ and uses those physical members to carry out His will. God is not limited at all to a temple made with hands. Stephen made that point very plainly. The temple at Jerusalem was merely a symbol of a reality, similar to the tabernacle in the wilderness, that God has committed Himself to dwell among His people.

When Stephen charged those listeners with the responsibility of betraying and murdering Jesus, he showed them what had happened all through their history to those who spoke for God, was happening again through them. In our day, history is repeating itself the same as in the past. But God is still in control and all that is happening today will pass when the just and righteous God makes things right. We are able to see things through God's Word and know that in spite of all the failures of men and nations, God will fulfill His purposes. Even though "evil men and seducers will wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived," God had everything under control. We may never know all the reasons behind events and seeming tragedies that happen, but God does, and by faith we trust Him.

The death of Stephen may seem to have been a great loss, and it was in a way. The first martyr of the church was an articulate man of Greek origin, so not only did he have the Jewish traditions and laws clear in his mind, but he was able to skillfully present the truth behind it all. There are many similarities in Stephen that were in the Lord Jesus Christ. In a sense, it was inevitable that his death would be similar to that of the Lord Jesus Christ - even to his last words. How important it is for us to know the truth of God's Word even to the historical aspects of it, in order that we can help audiences see the on-going march of divine planning in our day. If people can learn how they fit in God's scheme of things, maybe they will realize how important it is to seek the Lord while He may be found.

“What is the point of this,” they ask concerning things long ago.
“Why is it important today; how will it benefit me to know
About the Jews and Greeks and the problems they all had?
It seems like everything they did inevitably turned out bad.”

That is the point of looking back so that we won't do the same.
There is only safety from bad consequences when we do things in Jesus' name.
He lives in an eternal “Now,” and knows all that is coming ahead,
We can prepare for that by trusting Him, so there is no need for us to dread.

We know things will get much worse before they are going to get better.
That's one reason to learn from history, it is like learning from a well-written letter.
What those in the past did wrong, we learn from them to choose what's right
History and prophecy both teach us the value of living by faith, not sight.

Both history and prophecy record situations that make things seem so bleak.
Still there is meaning and joy for those who those lessons will seek.
We will learn when we read there are no mistakes, God has everything under control.
He allows mankind to go just so far, that we might willingly seek peace for our souls.

I learn from historical accounts; I have a place in the great scheme of things.
And I do not have to fear what is coming, even though life some tragedy brings.
Even though the last chapter of history is not written, the end of the Bible gives a clue
That God has not forever abandoned us, He will step in when mans' efforts are through.

“Father in heaven; Thy grace was surely manifested here in the past when there was a time of visitation. Now, however, there is a lack of knowledge of the part on the part of most who live here. They never experienced the power of the Gospel that was evident at the beginning of the work here. So for Thine own reason Thou hast sent us here at this time. May the word of God ministered to the believers awaken a desire to experience real fellowship with Thee. Help us all to learn the lessons our past can teach us as the Holy Spirit guides our thoughts. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Acts 7:48-50. *“Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, ‘Heaven is my throne,*

and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? Saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?"

TEMPLES.

What is a temple anyway?
Is it not a house where God must stay?
Not necessarily for this fact is true -
God's temple is not limited - He even dwells in you
Who know and have experienced God's free grace -
And the Holy Spirit uses us for His dwelling place.
One who is so big and mighty as God -
Cannot be limited or defined by words.
The universe is His - no limit to His size -
Yet in a human body, the Son of Man comes and dies -
And by His dying, though betrayed and murdered,
The good news of God was by faithful men furthered.
He is alive - He stood to receive His servant -
He is the same today - may I this truth have learn`ed.

"Gracious God, I thank Thee for showing in the scriptures the reality of a visible Man in the glory. Yet I still appreciate the fact of His omnipresence here. Some things I do not understand, and yet I rejoice in the reality of the Living Lord here where I am and visible where it is Thy divine plan that He should be seen. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 7:55-56. *"But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.'"*

THREE GREAT SIGHTS.

The sight of God's glory impressed greatly the man,
As he fell to the stones on that day.
For Stephen, the martyr, like Abraham before,
Knew God Almighty in a personal way.
God had appeared to Abraham in the past,
As he began living his life for the Lord.
Incentive for living by faith he received,
And he showed it by trusting God's Word.

Moses one day was off in the desert alone,
No one else was around but the sheep.
His life was half over and he had settled quite down,
After all the past turbulence - peace.
Then the angel of God appeared to him in the bush,
As it burned with holy fire so bright.
He was reminded again of his leadership role,
He was to lead God's people out of spiritual night.

Then Stephen, the deacon, one who had God's work to do,
As he recounted their history to them,
Reminded them all that their God they had failed;
They were condemned but didn't want to face sin.
God had appeared in the past to Abraham their father,
And appeared again to the greatest leader they knew.
The same God was here, in their presence again,
But the call to repent they eschewed.

Stephen didn't hold back in defense, but spoke out,
As he pointed out the truth of God's plan.
He passed by the temple as the truth of worship he taught,
And pointed out all the failures of those men.
But in spite of the failures and world events,
Be assured that God is still in control.
God will some day make right all the things that are wrong,
Just make sure all is well with your soul.

And as Stephen then spoke with a vision of God,
And the Son of God standing there by His side;

He raised his voice high and in words clear and strong,
He interceded for them and then honorably died.
The lesson for me as I sit here today,
Is to remember that God is well aware,
Of all that is happening and that needs to be done,
Before we can fully God's glory then share.

When first I began this journey with God,
I didn't know what was ahead.
But the sight of the Savior was enough to make me
Want to please the One who died in my stead.
In the middle of life and now on toward the last,
I still want to please Him and enjoy Him each day;
And tell others, like Stephen, and all those who serve;
In spite of what might happen, "Jesus lives and saves."

"The sight by faith of the Savior taking my place, has not dimmed, Father. O Lord my Savior: allow me as I live from day to day, to view the great sights of Thyself. Whether it is in the backward view of Thy cross-work; the present view of Thy intercession; or the coming view of Thy glory - my eyes are unto Thee my God. Amen."

Acts 8:1-25

PREACHING

Instead of responding to the command to take the Gospel everywhere, the believers were reluctant to leave Jerusalem. There is a natural inclination to resist change and when we have the encouragement of the fellowship of believers, we want to stay with them. The persecution that arose under the leadership of Saul forced the Lord's people to move to other places, but they were not silenced in any way as far as the Gospel was concerned. They "went everywhere preaching the word." In spite of what we know is right, we like to settle down into a comfortable pattern. Discomfort may be the best thing for us. When we have to move to some other area because of work or some other considerations, it is important that we also preach the word. That practice has made the work of God spread all over the world. It is not done only by a few missionaries or those who spend all their time preaching Christ, but by those believers who know the value of their own salvation and want other to have the same blessings they have received. Intense persecution scattered the believers from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria. We may not be scattered by persecution as much as by economic necessity, but for whatever reason, let us all commit ourselves to the preaching of "things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ."

Philip, the deacon (Acts 6:5) was one of the Greeks entrusted with meeting the needs of the saints in the distribution of food and finances. This was probably a different Philip than Philip, the apostle (Jn.1:43,41). Philip the deacon, and now the evangelist, went beyond the Jews to the Samaritans in spite of age-old prejudices. The Assyrian conquerors (722 B.C.) left the poorest people of the northern kingdom of Israel in the land. Then they resettled it with foreigners and they intermarried with the Jews who were left. Samaritans were considered "half-breeds" by the "pure" Jews of the southern kingdom, and there was intense hatred between the two groups. But Jesus went there and commanded His disciples to take the Gospel there. The evangelist has an implacable enemy, Satan - the adversary, and when God is working in a place where souls are being saved, we can expect difficulties of one kind or another. When a whole city is stirred and there is "great joy in that city," the adversary may use tactics of deception rather than opposition.

Unfortunately, there are times when the words people say and what is within them cannot be differentiated. Often at the beginning of a new work there are those attracted by the enthusiasm and evidence of change that they want to be a part of. They are inclined to be a part of it for different reasons. Some envision themselves taking a leadership role in a new church. Others want to interface with people for business reasons hoping to make some gains among this group of people. The power of the Holy Spirit became evident as the Lord opened the door of faith to the Samaritans and the apostles used their authority to make this baptism of the Spirit real to the new saints. When the apostles, Peter and John, came this spiritual gift was given by those apostles who were the foundation of the work. This wasn't done to the Samaritans on their own but by apostolic authority. The unbeliever, Simon, the sorcerer, wanted the same power as the apostles. He probably wanted to add to his dark powers of darkness. The wickedness of his own heart was revealed. Occasionally we have had the unfortunate experience of baptizing some who were never true children of God. How we long for understanding, lest we lead some into a false profession of faith, or allow deception to go undetected.

The response in Samaria was immediate and great. We can't pick and choose where we go. It was a crucial moment when Peter and John went to Samaria (John had wanted to call down fire from heaven to

destroy a Samaritan village at a previous occasion) because it kept them from being separated from other believers. They were able to evaluate the work and got involved themselves in it. They were assured that the Holy Spirit worked through all believers: mixed races, Gentiles, and Jews. They preached the word of the Lord to the saints in Samaria and on the return of the two apostles to Jerusalem, they preached the Gospel in many "villages of the Samaritans." There is great benefit in many ways when we support each other in the work and maintain a strong fellowship between the people of the Lord no matter what nationality or culture they might be.

Acts 8:25. *"And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the Gospel in many villages of the Samaritans."*

PREACHING.

"Preaching the word" refers to the total Bible message -
Redemption is a theme I look for when reading a biblical passage.
"Preaching Christ" is a reminder of the Messiah who did come.
He is the "Redeemer" - Christ is the "Anointed One."

Preaching the "kingdom of God" indicates the new birth
Was a Gospel theme to be proclaimed over all the earth.
The "name of Jesus Christ" gives preaching authority -
The power is in that name now, and forever it will be.

"The "word of the Lord" reminds me He was here among men
His life and words gave evidence He was the great "I AM."
As "Jesus" was preached to the eunuch, we do so today -
He and He alone is the Savior who eternally saves.

Whether it is to individuals or in city-wide campaigns -
The issues here at stake: are they preaching what the Bible says?
The heralding of the Gospel covers the needs of all mankind.
When a person responds to the preaching, the Savior they will find.

"O Gracious God of the Gospel, the words of truth that we have to preach are the same tonight in this meeting as the words preached by Philip in Samaria and in Gaza. I do want to give a clear presentation of the truth and I would like to speak with wisdom and spirit, and I want to be full of faith and power. If this clay vessel can be trusted - please give us spiritual children. I ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 8:30. *"And Philip ran thither to he, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, 'Understandest thou what thou what thou readest?'"*

OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES.

In the middle of this success and excitement, Philip was directed by God to another foreigner in the desert. One important encounter with a significant man from a distant country, may have affected an entire nation. Then he was moved on to Caesarea, where later he was Paul's host. Paul's persecution forced Philip out of Jerusalem, and now Philip's work was continued right across the Roman empire by Paul.

Preaching is not limited to crowds of people. There are many opportunities that arise when the most effective way of preaching is the personal explanations of the scriptures, both in exposition and in application. We all need a knowledge of the word of God so we can explain truth when asked a question in a way that is both relevant and understandable. Philip knew the way to apply the truth of Isaiah 53 to the Ethiopian so there was no question as to who the Lord Jesus Christ was and what it meant to believe on Him. There was no casual suggestion as to what faith in Christ meant.

"Come now, and let us reason together", saith the Lord." Are words like this hard to understand? What would make the Ethiopian find reading the words of the prophet hard to understand? For the natural man without any background of a God who has a personal interest in men, this could be very hard to grasp. The Creator of the universe having interest in one man, out of all the millions on earth; would perhaps be hard to take in. In our frame of reference, most of us feel quite insignificant when we are in a great crowd of people or even when we think that we are only one in a nation of 300 million or one in a world of 6 billion. But the scriptures assure us - "Thou God seest me." [Isa.1]. So the Old Testament scriptures teach us of God's interest in us.

"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory." [Isa.6]. The prophet Esaias gave

clear insights into what God is like in Himself. The absolute holiness of God makes the sinfulness of man stand out in its dark clarity. He teaches us that "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteous nesses are as filthy rags." [Isa.64]. In reading through the words of this one prophet, the contrast of the Holiness of God and the sinfulness of man, bring us to repentance and to the place God can get our attention.

"He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities..." [Isa.53] give us a clear picture of the principle of substitution. But it goes even farther than the principle, to the Person who is the substitute – the Lord Jesus Christ. The Ethiopian asked, "Of whom speaketh the prophet this?" How could a holy God allow such a Perfect Servant, that we read of from chapters 42-53 be allowed to be such a substitute. God's grace is unfolded page after page as the Old Testament scriptures bring into full view, the Holy One who pleased the Holy God, and who He gave for unholy men. How can such a needed connection be made between the two? "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I AM God and there is none else." [Isa.45]. The greatest possible blessing is presented, "Be ye saved," for the greatest possible number of people, "All the ends of the earth," on the easiest possible terms, "Look unto Me," from the greatest possible Person, I AM God."

"I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud thy sins: return unto Me for I have redeemed thee." [Isa.44]. The result of the acts of a Holy God, by His Holy Servant, on behalf of unholy men, is that the redemption price for our sins has been paid in full. Now we are to simply look to Him; return to Him and accept what He has provided for us. The Old Testament scriptures are clear, and the truth of God's salvation is presented there for us who live today and read those ancient writings. God is still the same.

For this Ethiopian eunuch God used the SCRIPTURES: v.28, 32, 35. "The entrance of Thy word giveth light." What are the scriptures? They are the inspired words of God written by "holy men of old" who were moved by the Holy Spirit. How do we know they are true? The scriptures have been proven by millions who have believed them, accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their own Savior who was testified to by the scriptures, and have found the truths taught in the scriptures to actually do what they promised. Some may ask the question, "Why should I believe them?" Many of the prophesies that were written came to be fulfilled hundreds of years after the writing of the scriptures. Particularly those that we written concerning the birth, death and resurrection of Christ. Also, many predictions concerning the nation of Israel have been, and are being, fulfilled. God has made His will and Himself known through the scriptures.

God also used the SPIRIT, v.29, to guide Philip to this man and to bring the answers of peace that he needed. "When He, the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth." There are a number of ways the Holy Spirit of God works on behalf of the seeking sinner. We are warned by the Spirit. We are taught by the Spirit. We are convicted by the Spirit. We are born again by the Spirit. We are led by the Spirit. We are guided by the Spirit. The Lord Jesus promised the Spirit of God would be at work in the world after He went to heaven and that evidence is certainly true.

To reach this man who was searching for God and to reach people today as well, God uses a ready and willing SERVANT: v.26,29,31, 35, 37, 38. We are told to "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel." God's servants are God's sign posts, God's messengers, God's witnesses, God's tools, God's chosen vessels. We learn from this story that there are those who God knows are seeking for Him, and it is up to us to be where we should be and ready for His use when He directs us

"How clear it is to me today, O God of saving grace: that people in time past, the same as today, had to know about the Redeemer. How gracious it is of Thee to provide such clear written words for those who are seeking the Lord to be able to find Thee. For those who are searching this day for peace and salvation, I pray Thou will lead someone to them. If there is someone that I should reach today, please lead me to that soul today. Amen."

Acts 9:1-31

Acts 9:13. *"Lord, I have heard by many of this man..."*

THIS MAN.

Saul was a fiercely intense person who is introduced as one opposed to the Gospel. After his encounter with the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus, he went from being a persecutor of God's people to being a preacher of the Gospel he had once opposed. His intensity was channeled for the furtherance of the Gospel. He was well-trained by Gamaliel. He knew the Bible. From years of learning and quiet meditation, he became a world-renowned missionary. He was able to promote the Gospel with clear logic, personal experience and a passionate concern for others. He was able to see the picture of what God was going to

do through the Gospel. He was a man of conviction, but was also able to see how other people were thinking. He used every advantage – his background, his training, his citizenship, his mind, his weakness – to further the work the Lord had given him to do. From articulate preacher to inspired writer, he used every divinely given gift he was given and he allowed God to use him to be all that he could be for the sake of the Gospel. From being a Gospel preacher to a church planter God used this available man in many different ways. His ministry led him to be a caring spiritual father, and to be a challenging spiritual corrector. Even though he was one sensitive to God's leading, he was not one afraid to live himself.

Through the words of Ananias, we get insight as to how the Lord viewed the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. God had followed him through the school of Gamaliel, when he was under the jurisdiction of the high priest, right on to the road to Damascus where Saul was finally stopped. In a remarkable work of grace Saul saw the risen Lord Jesus Christ Himself and was blinded by the glory of God with what seemed like scales of safety put over his eyes. The only person he was involved with for three days was the Lord. Then Ananias heard from the Lord that Saul was chosen by the Lord to represent Him to the Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel. By the words of Ananias his eyesight was miraculously restored and those scales fell off.

What we hear and what really is true; often are very different. What a person was in the past, may have been very different than what is that same person is presently. The work of God in events and people is very impacting. He can change what is dark to light; what is hopeless to joy; what is useless into something useful.

We may underestimate the work of the Lord, when by His grace He saves people we thought were unlikely candidates for salvation. Our limitations are because we only see the outward appearances. God looks on the heart. God is no respecter of persons and neither should we be when the grace of God is seen in ways we least expected.

In people, aliens can become citizens; enemies can become friends; skeptics can become believers; those who oppose can, be promoters of what they once fought. The only way we can make a true evaluation of a person, is to see them through God's eyes. The change came in Paul because of one word – "Lord." That changed "this man" into "Brother Saul." He was changed from a "persecutor and injurious person" into a "chosen vessel unto Me." He changed from "he that destroyed them which called upon this Name," to one who was to "bear My Name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." Instead of making others to suffer, he would "suffer for My Name's sake."

A number of years passed in the life of Saul about which we know very little. God was preparing his "chosen vessel" in a number of different ways and places for the work ahead of him. He would have learned much of the Lord and the basis of the new covenant when he was in the deserts of Arabia. He learned how to be on the receiving end of persecution when he was in Damascus. He learned the necessity of fellowship and meaningful communication with others from Barnabas. He would have learned how to respond to skeptical believers in Jerusalem.

It is a cause for joy to know that assemblies were planted in places where the Lord Jesus Christ had preached in Judea, Galilee and Samaria. We will not always see ourselves, the result of what the Lord had led us to do in places where it seemed there was nothing done. In God's time and way those assemblies were taught and built up. The saints were conducting themselves honorably with a sense of awe as they realized they were walking in the steps of Jesus and were representing Him. The Holy Spirit assured them they were doing what the Lord intended and there was on-going blessing in salvation.

Everything we do has value when we are willing to take time to learn the things of the Lord and are willing to live with dignity, respect and honor in a way that brings glory to our Lord. When that is true of us we will know the comfort of the Spirit in spite of anything that may happen. Perhaps the Lord will trust us with some new lambs to be added to us and then multiplied.

"May I never make snap judgments based only on what I have heard of a person's past life, or even on hearsay in the present. Give me, Father, the privilege of seeing people through "the Father's eyes" and not the eyes of biased or prejudiced men. Amen."

Acts 9:31. *"Then had all the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord; and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied."*

"LORD."

There they were – changed people: disciples, followers, learners of the Word,

Each one unique, yet each one had been *Redeemed* by the Lord. v.1

A question from an angry man who heard One speak from heaven above,
Now *Replied* in a fearful voice, "Oh – who art Thou, O Lord!" v.5

The *Reality* of the Lord comes now in words so clear –
Anything done or said on earth is heard in Jesus' ear. v.5

Recognition of the Lord desire is in various ways expressed –
One willing to do what the Lord does want, is a resounding "Yes!" v.6

Immediate submission to the Lord's right to *Rule* is evidence of life,
Now changed from the darkness of mans' mind to living in God's light. v.6

To some it may be a *Revelation* that Jesus is Lord of all –
In every incident in life, He has the right to make each call. v.10

When I know He speaks I must respond with *Respect*.
To Him who is the Lord and knows the reason behind every act. v.10

I have a *Responsibility* when the Lord gives direction to me,
To go where He wants me to go, or be what He wants me to be. v.11

To give *Resistance* to the Lord is to deny He has the right,
To expect me to walk by faith, when in arrogance I walk by sight. v.13

In tones of grace and patience the Lord *Reminds* me again,
He is not asking my permission when He a task does send. v.15

When I am called to go somewhere or carry out a task,
I am a *Representative* of the Lord, not a question should I ask. v.17

Looking back with grateful heart, I the Lord's ways with me *Review*,
And notice that much is the same, and yet old things are made new. v.27

Reverence for the Lord should in every place, be obvious to all,
And reverence will always be evident when on His name I call. v.31

When life has real meaning, there are seen some good *Results*
From the Lord using His own work through me to be presented to Himself. v.35

So like those ancient saints, I too have *Received* the Lord;
And by God's grace and power am committed to go forward. v.42

"I pray that I truly understand, O God, what it means to be obedient to the Lordship of Christ and not just try to make definitions about this. He is the Lord of my life. He owns me and I want to serve Him with reverence and genuine respect doing His will from my heart. I have received Thee, Lord Jesus. I submit to Thy authority and want to be ready to act in every good work I am called to. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 9:32-43

CHRIST AS LORD

As the movement of the believers in Christ rapidly grew there were people from all walks of life who found out following the Lord Jesus Christ involves new life. Paul, the persecutor became a trailblazer for God. He knew his calling and pressed ahead with confidence in God right from the time he said, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" His life for the Lord included three missionary journeys, pioneer labors that opened up new work and new assemblies were planted as a result of his efforts in Asia Minor and in Europe.

Ananias was a willing man who God could trust with a very important task. To go to the well-known persecutor and take the initiative over such a high-profile person who was in opposition to the spread of the Gospel, wasn't just an act of courage but was an act of faith. He was willing to do what God said and acted

in spite of his fears. "Behold, I am here, Lord," are the words of a committed man. What a blessing came as a result of Ananias just obeying the Lord! No doubt he was a leader of the Lord's people living in the local area of Damascus

Later in the chapter we read again of Barnabas who was not only an encourager but was a man of discernment. He could sense truth in another person. He must have made it a point of communicating with Saul and learned how he "Had seen the Lord in the way." He too was a leader in the local area and had influence enough to introduce Saul to the assembly and they received him as a participant in the work there in Jerusalem.

The apostle Peter moved from being a fisherman and a follower of the Lord while He was on earth to being a builder of saints and assemblies. He knew the need of connecting with the saints of God and passed through all quarters to encourage and feed the sheep and the lambs as the Lord had instructed him. The work of an Itinerant teacher was important then as it is now. God's people had to be instructed as to the mind and will of God.

Another willing worker for the Lord in the sphere of service God called her to was Dorcas. She was a worker for the Lord and met the needs of the saints in spite of obscurity. She was full of good works and well known in the local area for her "Good works and alms deeds." Not everyone is willing to work behind the scenes and leave the public accolades to others. Often, we are satisfied with giving a small percentage of our time, talent and goods, and think we have done a wonderful thing that people should notice. Not many are "full" of anything. Usually we live way below our potential. I have heard it said to people, "You are full of nonsense" or other phrases that indicate some personality or character trait that is negative. There are others like Stephen, who were full of faith, full of the Holy Ghost and full of power. Some times it is indicated that there were those who had some godly Christ-like characteristics. The Lord Himself was here "full of grace and truth." I think Dorcas stands alone as one "full of good works." This epitomizes the intention God has for His people – "a peculiar people, zealous of good works." If that were the case of all of us, the whole world would take notice of the Gospel rather than the people. Paul wrote Titus to tell the believers at Crete "to be ready to every good work." Then they were to "maintain good works"; and again "to maintain good works for necessary uses." Good works accompanying the work of the Gospel, has always been the intention of God. It is the wise man and woman that patterns their life after Dorcas who perhaps wasn't fully appreciated until after she died.

We don't know too much about Simon the Tanner, but we do know he was a hospitable man. In the local assembly such people are needed to assist those who teach the word of preach the Gospel. They may not be well known or seriously thought of but their hospitality is not only remembered by those to whom it was shown, but by the Lord for whom this service was done.

Jesus is Lord whether we want Him to be or not [Col.1:16-18]. You control very little of your life – only the small but important part called "your will. Some of the reasons we do not want to acknowledge Him as Lord are that He may ask us to do something we do not want to do. Nobody likes the cross; nobody likes to deny himself and nobody likes to die. We like to think we know what is best for us. A child left to himself will probably hurt himself. Mature adults left to themselves, do hurt themselves. It is wisdom to acknowledge Jesus Christ is Lord. We may not like what we are called to do and for a moment are not sure God has our best interest at heart. But if God wanted to make it hard on us, can you imagine what He could do? Those people then owned Him as Lord of their lives and did what they did as to the Lord and not to men.

What it means to acknowledge Him as Lord, Mat.6:19, is it means we understand the needs and frailties of people – ourselves included. It will also testify we want the Lord and His name honored – not ours. We can, with integrity, say it is God's kingdom we are seeking to build – not our own Sunday School, church, missionary program. When we are actually involved in finding God's will and doing it we will surrender all we are and have and hope to be to Him. We are willing to commit ourselves to Him without holding anything back and we are willing to confess our sin to Him, and forsake those things that are sin and lead to temptation. Submitting to the Lordship of Christ means we are willing to admit honestly, our need of God.

Jesus wants to be Lord so He can guide us to safely move ahead or to hold us back. Lordship involves real commitment. Peter was a successful fisherman who honestly wanted to submit to Christ and His Word obediently, humbly and joyfully. To live for Christ is our response to the One who "saved others, Himself He cannot save." Mk.15:31. "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it" Mk. 8:34. Why should a person to make such a strong commitment? Life is a vapor. Jas. 4:14. Time is so short. Eternal things are God, His Word, and eternal souls. Everything else is going to burn. 11 Pet.3:10. There are things we can properly do but not live for. Commitment to the Lordship of Christ is the only thing that counts when it comes to service for the

Lord. 1Cor.15:58. "Be steadfast..." This labor is not in vain. How do you make this commitment? Leave the others and step out alone. Lu.9:23, "If anyone would come after Me.." Be a true disciple. Ananias had a hard task but was willing to obey the Lord no matter the consequences. Christ was willing to die for this very reason. Not for a selfish purpose but that "...that He might be Lord" (truth established) Rom. 14:7-10. God has determined that Jesus is both Lord and Christ, Acts2:36. Saul of Tarsus had it right when he said, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Acts 9:4-6.

"Father, help me to give credit where credit is due, both privately and publicly. Also, challenge me to apply myself to the whole wide-open area of good works, Amen."

Acts 10:1-19

PREPARATION OF THE SERVANT

The way the Lord arranged for Peter to go Caesarea and open the door to the Gentiles through Cornelius, helps us to understand the fact that God is totally aware of every person and every need. In order for Peter to reach out to the Gentiles, God had first to reach out to him. The ancient prejudices that affected the Jews were such that there was no significant interchange between the cultures. The legalism of the Jews religion was a barrier that had to be removed so the mandate Christ gave could be fulfilled. Perhaps the implication of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ had never fully sunk in. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature..." was an all-inclusive commission that needed some God-given incentive.

When a person is by themselves and in contact with God, that is a place where God can speak to the soul. A seeking sinner wanting to know God can be assured God hears their prayer. When one is aware of the needs of others around them as well as their own need, the Holy Spirit has prepared fertile ground for the good seed of the word of God to fall on and bear fruit. Cornelius' sincerity was not questioned by the angel of God. Cornelius was already conscious of the Lord when in fear he asked, "What is it Lord?" The awakening was obviously a work of the Holy Spirit. The sincerity and reality of Cornelius' interest is a good example to us of the need in people we contact. We are not able in ourselves to judge the urgency and honesty of those we seek to reach with the Gospel, but we can take them at their word and present God's truth to them. The Spirit of God takes it from there and uses the Word as He see fit.

Communion with the Lord is the lifeline of fellowship with God on the part of Christians. In order to maintain this communion, time has to be taken to pray, read the word of God and meditate on what we read. Peter was in a position and condition where he could receive wisdom and guidance from God. He knew the value of prayer. During the years of his discipleship with the Lord, he would have often seen the Lord Jesus going to a private place to speak with His Father. In that place of fellowship, he was in the condition of soul for God to give him further understanding of the divine program for the church. Rather than speaking only with words, God used an illustration to drive home the point to Peter that Gentiles also have a place in the plans of God. If it had happened only once, Peter might have questioned it as only a dream of some kind. Each time the vision began with heaven opened and came down to earth to convince him of the divine origin of the lesson. The fact that it was repeated three times added the sense of authority and testimony to the vision.

From time to time in life there are issues that arise in our service for God that we may not know at the moment what to do about it. It is a mistake if we dismiss some of these impressions or incidents out of hand. When we are enjoying fellowship and communion with God, He uses a variety of means to enforce the teaching of scripture that assures us of the activities He intends for us to address. We may not realize for some time that we are being prepared by God for something we had never thought about or even prayed about. Communion with God in prayer and in our devotional life puts us in a condition of soul where we are open to God's leading and then assures us of His will. It may only take one incident in the future to clarify the reason for the lesson.

Preparation of soul and spirit - yes, and even the body, opens the way for opportunities for God to use us. When we are available, the Lord can give us understanding that we never had before. A person yielded to the Lord and actually gladly submitting to the Lordship of Christ, can be led by the Spirit to the exact place and person who is the object of God's attention. An unexpected visitation from God to a seeking sinner, and an unexpected visitation from God to an earnest believer opened the door of blessing all across the world. And it all happened in the space of one week.

What is so important about those private times of prayer?
Why, it is in those times God in marvelous grace draws near!
Whether it be on a rooftop, in a room or other private place -
The saint who loves the Lord comes to seek the Father's face.

Then in some distant place removed, another head is bowed.
Genuine humility and a sincere heart is found,
As one who knows within there is a need he cannot meet -
And the heart of God is moved the seeking sinner there to greet.

By holy initiative the actions of divine grace
Move those two from different paths of life to meet face to face.
The common link between the two is holy preparation
Done by in each one's heart by the God of our salvation.

One comes with burdened heart seeking peace unto his soul.
The other comes with assurance that God brought him there to show
The way of salvation clearly so the hearers on Christ will believe -
And then the grace of God leads the seeker Jesus to receive.

Things may be hidden from us when strange events come to pass.
It isn't always we get an answer to every question we ask.
So it is wise for us to wait for God in His own good time -
To remove the questions we have, and reveal to us His mind.

Faith on the part of a sinner leads him to the One who saves.
Faith on the part of the Christian reminds us of what the Savior gave
To redeem and cleanse from sin, and this he tells to others -
That beyond man-made barriers, we become sisters and brothers.

"Father of mercy and God of all grace: what an encouragement it is to know there are those who are seeking Thee although unknown to me. I pray I will be in close enough fellowship with Thee to be ready for Thee to use in bringing them the Gospel. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 10:20-48

GOD IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS

Peter's experience with the Lord had prepared him for the work ahead of him. The Holy Spirit had also been working with Cornelius to prepare him to receive the message of the Gospel. There was no question this generous, respected man was sincere in his fear of God, but being earnest in one's desire to find God does not make one righteous before God. Faith in Christ saves the lost soul, and Cornelius had yet to hear of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. There are many hindrances to a person hearing the Gospel. Peer pressure, religious prejudice, false teaching are only a few of the barriers that keep people from the Savior. The Jews and Gentiles in the early days of the church were separated by culture and national barriers. Jews were hostile to the Gentiles and the Gentiles looked on the Jews with disdain. So for Peter to be designated by God to open the door of the Gospel to the Gentiles was a great act of huge and lasting proportions. In spite of what he felt personally, Peter was willing to obey what the Spirit of God directed. The Gospel was now for everyone. "God our Savior, who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

Peter wisely took others with him when he went to Caesarea with the three men Cornelius sent. "In the mouths of two or three witnesses let every word be established." To cross a centuries old barrier was no small matter. Any outreach work today to which God sends His servants needs more than one person so they can witness the scriptural and moral integrity of both the laborer/speaker and the hearer. Those who are longing for peace with God need to have someone to guide them to the Savior by pointing out the truth as to who the Lord Jesus Christ is. Peter's short message is a clear, precise presentation of the Gospel that can serve as an example to us. He identified the Lord Jesus very specifically. He told the hearers of His perfect life of service, of His death and of His resurrection. He also testified of his own personal connection with the Lord when He was here, and his responsibility now to publicly testify that Jesus Christ is the One and Only Savior and Judge.

The length of a message does not necessarily make it effective. It is the content that counts. We should always have a definite goal in view when we speak. The ultimate objective is that people know who the Lord Jesus is and they must come to Him by faith for salvation. The Holy Spirit guides one who is led by Him to speak about the Lord Jesus Christ and direct the hearers through the scriptures to believe on Him. The prophets of old are witnesses as to the result of faith in Christ. We have many New Testament Scriptures as well that assure people when they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, they have eternal life.

But assent to the facts was not all that Peter expected and the Holy Spirit disturbed the meeting with proof

that what he preached was understood and accepted. Through the "hearing of the word" the Holy Spirit gave life to those who believed. The on-lookers who came with Peter could see for themselves that "God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him."

There was evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit when the Gospel was first preached to the Jews in Jerusalem and Judea. Then again similar evidence was given as a result of the preaching of the Gospel to the Samaritans. New evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the Gentile believers was seen by those Jews who saw before their eyes proof of salvation being granted to the Gentiles. In Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost the evidence was seen and heard that the Holy Spirit had come to the Jews. Now in Cornelius' house as soon as "remission of sins" was preached, evidence was seen of the Holy Spirit coming on the Gentiles. Peter and the Jewish brethren with him now knew the Gentiles were included in the plans of God. When Cornelius and those in his house believed on the Lord Jesus Christ there was no question as to their salvation.

Believers are baptized after they receive the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives life. Baptism is the testimony on the part of the new believers to the fact they have eternal life and "are risen to walk in newness of life." When people are saved by God's grace, it is important that they have instruction as to what this new life is and how to conduct themselves as a "new creation in Christ Jesus." The on-going fellowship of believers is needed and how this is to be done is contained in the commission the Lord gave when He said, "... teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," - and Peter fulfilled that mandate. We are not done with our responsibility to new believers, until we can see evidence, they are practicing what the word of God teaches. It will probably take much longer today in some places because some have to unlearn wrong things, before they can learn those right things the scriptures teach.

One man was praying in earnest supplication -
Another man praying was a faithful servant with dedication -
Neither fully realized they were the objects of divine initiation -
By God who is no respecter of persons.

One had a visitor from God when he was in deep concentration -
The other had a vision when he was in quiet contemplation -
Both were chosen by God who planned a special time of visitation -
By God who is no respecter of persons.

One man was a Gentile sent to keep peace by foreign occupation -
The other was a Jew, a son of God's chosen earthly nation -
For them to be brought together by God was a remarkable situation
By God who is no respecter of persons.

One may be young and worldly wise with a secular education -
Another may be old and was taught by those with a different orientation -
And God brings them together to learn with earnest consideration -
From God who is no respecter of persons.

One needs to hear the clear Gospel that he might find God's salvation -
The other need to commit himself to preach with faithful consecration -
And present the Gospel of God's grace to one ready to hear by holy preparation -
Of God who is no respecter of persons.

"I am looking on that scene of two cultures, two religions, two diverse men, Gracious Father, and I am moved in my spirit by the richness of Thy grace. I am here today because of what happened then. By Thy infinite foreknowledge through that door opened to the Gentiles, I have been blessed. And now in this distant place on the far part of the world, Thy grace is still reaching out to people in this land. I praise Thee, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 10: 30-31. *"And Cornelius said, 'Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, ' Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are has in remembrance in the sight of God.'"*

IN THE SIGHT OF GOD.

The head is bent low; the posture revealing -
Earnest entreaty; a recognition of need; an acknowledging of insufficiency.
Low murmuring of words intended for the Hearer only -

Words of respect, honor, exaltation, entreaty that must be said from a searching heart.
A quiet dignity befitting one who is coming into the presence of a Greater -
Again, and again, the searcher-seeker comes for comfort, solace and inner peace.

The table is spread; others sit to eat: the wife, the children, the servants
But his need is too great to be filled with the food of a fleshly appetite.
Within the soul is the cry for fullness, fulfillment that cannot be found
The hunger for righteousness is overwhelming all other needs.
The desire transcends all other occupations as the inner man hungers -
Again, and again, the hungered soul comes longing for satisfaction.

The paycheck comes and is cashed; bills and change placed in safe-keeping -
There are hungry people in the streets; homeless need shelter; the orphans are wanting.
On every hand there comes the calls for help, and the alms are given -
Not for personal gain is this largesse passed on, but to meet obvious needs.
In the name of Him that is Holy, is this dispensing of grace given -
Again, and again, the hungry are fed; the homeless are warmed - the emptiness remains.

Above, unseen, aware of all that is done and thought and wanted and needed -
Is God: all-seeing, all-knowing, in every place, watching every act and reason.
Of all the people doing the same things but for different reasons - God sees -
And God then acts through His servant, righteous but unknowing, ready but not willing.
And God "kills two birds with one stone;" He teaches His messenger -
He reaches the longing soul of a man hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

The two come together; this is unheard of - it is not to be done, but it happens -
Because both men live and move and think - in the sight of God.
They are aware, each in their own way, from their own cultural background -
"God is God, and I am empty until God fills me with Himself."
My soul is hungry, my heart is sad, my life is empty, the efforts useless" -
Until both humbled men, meet each other and are joined as brothers - in the sight of God.

And I too, in this place of reflection and careful consideration wait expectantly -
For what do I wait? Readiness in my soul: filling and preparing me - in the sight of God.
From the words I read to enlighten; to give me thoughts and understanding to pass on -
From the scattered thoughts that gel into an orderly presentation - in the sight of God.
I wait, and wonder, and worship, and watch for those opportunities to find the hungry -
And then to pass on what God has given me to them, that they might know they live -
In the sight of God.

"O God of all grace: I am reviewing this important, world-changing event of the Gentiles and Jews being brought together in one body, and I am brought to praise Thee here. I am in the middle of a Jewish neighborhood today. I can sense how important it is to be led by Thee to individuals. There is no sense of contact at random. If there are those to whom I am sent - make it clear to me. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 10:35. *"But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him."*

ACCEPTED WITH HIM.

From every nation they come - brought together by common bond:
Unknown to each other - separated by distance, language, culture -
Yet coming to a common attraction - drawn by a single similarity -
A reverential respect for One who is unseen, yet revealed to righteous eyes
Of faith that reasons, and looks beyond the tangible to the real.
The proofs are there, so righteous acts toward others
Are deeds done as unto Him, who shows Himself as God,
Through those made in His image with mind and heart and will.

Why so many? Not one the same, everyone unique in personhood.
How can the image of an infinite God be revealed to a watching universe?
In every nation, "He that feareth God and worketh righteousness" is accepted,
And is a revelator of God-like characteristics that takes thousands -
No - more like millions or even billions of persons from every nation -
Different in color, language, heritage to display the One True God.
Now, all over the world, every day, in every nation, to every generation
"Jesus Christ is Lord" - is visibly, morally and personally proclaimed to all mankind.

"It never ceases to amaze me, O God of all nations and people, that the evidence of God is seen in fellow believers every where I have traveled. We are all different but similar; very remote in

background but very close in faith. I thank Thee for all my brothers and sisters in Christ and praise Thee for such grace that took all of us diverse people and made us one in Christ. Amen."

Acts 11:1-18

ACCOUNTABILITY

It is not uncommon for us to resist change. We become comfortable with what we know personally and have experienced. When word comes that something different is happening to someone else and it has been effective, if we are not careful, we may become skeptical about it. On the opposite side of the matter, if the Spirit of God has directed us, as He did Peter, to go somewhere else and do something that hasn't been done before as a general practice among God's people in the work of the Lord, others will question our actions - and rightly so. In order to keep us from arbitrarily acting independently for our own reason, the practice of accountability has biblical precedent behind it. We are accountable to God. We are accountable to our assembly, to our fellow workers, to the believers in the area where we are laboring and to the unbelievers to faithfully declare the unchanging word of God. The message never changes. Methods may change to suit the place and occasion as long as they are not contrary to the revealed word of God.

When Peter returned from Caesarea where Cornelius and those in his house were reached with God's salvation by grace, it was only right that he should give an explanation to those who doubted the actions he took. By rehearsing the whole chain of events to those brethren, and carefully pointing out to them the most salient points of the matter to the skeptics, the whole event became a very positive thing instead of being controversial. The residual effects of Judaism were not completely finished, but clarification by Peter officially settled the matter. True, there were still those who clung to the old traditions and thought they were necessary and caused problems from time to time. That will happen still in our day and we will not be able to entirely avoid some differences of opinion. But as far as the work of the Spirit of God that is seen in an area, that is indisputable.

Accountability to God is our first responsibility. When we have been directed by God to do a work for Him, that is not to be refused. We are incapable of knowing all that God has planned, but we are not only able, but obligated to act upon divine direction. In the same recorded incident, we learn that Peter was accountable to the believers in Joppa, so are we in whatever local assembly we are linked to at the time. Peter wisely took six brethren with him to this new venture. To act independently, in an area we are visiting is entirely inappropriate. The people of that area live there and will be there after we are gone. We are accountable to them to inform them of our interest and plans, and to make sure they are a part of what we do as much as possible.

In the same way Peter was accountable to clearly present the Gospel to the unsaved Gentiles in Cornelius' house, so we are to the unbelievers to whom God sends us. They have the right to know the Gospel, even though at the time they may not understand their need of it. We fail them if we do not give them a clear, precise presentation of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ and their need of Him and His salvation to save them from the consequences of their sin. It is wrong for us to leave them without hope.

Not all of the people in our home assembly will understand, or maybe even agree with, the work we do. But they do have the right to know what we have done, are doing and plan to do in the future. We are one of them. We are members in that body of saints. What I do affects them. For that reason, they have the right to know the purpose behind the things I do. Peter carefully went over all the things that led up to this opening of the work of God in Caesarea. He told of his own exercise in prayer and how God spoke to him. He told of Cornelius' experience with God before he was saved. He spoke of the fact that six other Jewish believers were there to bear witness to the whole important event. Most importantly he told of the actions of the Holy Spirit when he was speaking to the Gentiles in that house. Even though the Jerusalem brothers had questions about the rightness of the situation at first, when they heard of the actions of God in the matter that could be verified by witnesses, their criticisms were silenced and praise to God for opening the door to the Gentiles resulted.

It is possible for people to be inclined to accept only what they have experienced or what appeals to them. We have to be careful that our own personal agenda does not conflict with what God is doing. Those Jerusalem brethren has not previously considered that God was now fulfilling in their own day and in their own place that which had been prophesied hundreds of years before. God was making His "name great among all nations." The same Holy Spirit who had identified them as believers, now identified Gentile believers in the same way. The Gospel preached in Jerusalem was affirmed by the Holy Spirit. The same thing had been demonstrated in Samaria, and now had been seen at Caesarea in the Gentile believers. There was no question - God's saving grace had reached to Gentiles who were not even Jewish proselytes. The Gospel is truly "unto all."

When questions arise in minds, but yet with words are still unsaid,
There are potential problems that with our imaginations are being fed.
A word to the wise is this, when something is new - give explanations
That will calm the suspicions people have, and avoid useless agitations.

Explain clearly what moved you to act in a way unexpected.
Carefully point out the fact that truth was well protected.
When God gives directions, then act with witnesses two or more,
Then distinctly defend your actions when you are given the floor.

Tell how God has led you to do the work in which you're involved.
Give scriptural backing for your action so an issue is easily resolved.
Don't apologize for what is right, but with grace speak the truth,
Acknowledging the skeptics' reserve with dignity for what it is worth.

Accountability has reasons why it should kindly be given.
We are not independent when we speak for the kingdom of heaven.
Respectfully point out the fact the Spirit said not to doubt
God in infinite wisdom knows exactly what you are about.

To those we represent or to those who give us their support.
We are accountable, and they deserve a full report
Of what we have done and of what we are intending to do.
Their moral and spiritual support will be there when you are through.

We are not free to do just what we want in our tasks;
A reasonable report should be given when we're asked.
Fellowship with God and men both need to be nourished
By those at home, so by those who go out, the work will flourish.

“Gracious Father, the kindness of God's people is very manifest to me. They support us in prayer, finances and in faith. May this servant never let them down. Keep me faithful to them and to Thee. I yield myself to Thee again this morning - to do Thy will and work with vigor and commitment. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Acts 11:19-30

SIGNIFICANT CHANGES

For quite some time the work of the early church was centered in Jerusalem among the Jews and Jewish proselytes. Because of the on-going persecution of the believers following the death of Stephen, disciples moved to other areas, but they were not silent about their faith in Christ. As Jews they had only preached to Jews until the news came to them that the door of salvation had been opened to the Gentiles also. The practice of moving away from an established assembly is not wrong in itself. The motive behind a move is what has to be considered. Those disciples moved out and preached "the Lord Jesus." When we do that for the same reason where there needs to be a scriptural presentation of the Gospel, such a move can be right. To move only for the reason of increasing wealth was not taught nor practiced by those early saints. Physical survival and at the same time fulfilling the commission given by the Lord was behind that significant change that took place and brought the Gospel to Antioch.

Those believers who brought the Gospel to Antioch were not apostles who had been personally given the mandate by the Lord Jesus Christ. These were men from the eastern Mediterranean island of Cyprus and the north African area of Cyrene. When they got to Antioch, they didn't hesitate to preach to non-Jews which was another significant change in the developing work. They were active and aggressive in reaching out to those with whom they came in contact, preaching "the Lord Jesus" to them. When an opportunity arises for us to be in a new area, we need to be ready to pass on the Gospel and make connections with those around us. The key to accepting this change was "the hand of the Lord was with them." As a result a great number became believers in Christ and they "turned to the Lord." Open doors when the Lord works in blessing His word, are not hard to see. The Spirit of God prepares the hearts and minds of people to receive the word of God.

Follow-up of new believers happened quickly in Antioch. The assembly of saints at Jerusalem sent Barnabas right away to go and support the new work there. Effective teaching soon after people are saved is a very important part of any new outreach of the Gospel. Know the people. Relate to the needs of the people. Teach those new believers so a strong relationship with the Lord is established and is able to be maintained. The Antioch believers were "added unto the Lord," indicating that what they were taught right at

the beginning, they followed, and committed themselves to the teaching they were given. The new assembly followed those principles taught at the beginning and that established the character of the work. Those principles still apply and need to be taught today because assemblies will take their character from those events, practices and the people who taught them in the beginning of the work.

It is important to note that the work in Antioch was really a team effort. Brothers from Cyprus and Cyrene brought the Gospel at first. Then Barnabas came from Jerusalem to encourage and exhort the believers. How he had kept in touch with Saul we do not know, but he knew Saul's gift and knew that was needed at Antioch. The uniqueness of each God-given gift is recognized by others. Those men were not paid pastors and teachers. They identified themselves "with the people" and used what they had been given by God for the benefit of a great many of those new converts. Inter-assembly fellowship and support was another change of significant importance that was introduced in Antioch and is still of great and lasting value today among the assemblies of God's people.

This same practice continued when those of a different gift, the prophets, came to give Antioch believers an understanding of things yet to come. In those days before the written New testament scriptures were given, prophets were in the foundation of the church to prepare God's people for daily living and for what was ahead of them. There is great value when gifts are used for the benefit of the Lord's people. We need the blessing of the functioning, consistent use of gifts to meet our needs.

Compassion for saints in need in other places was also a significant change that was practiced in the new assembly at Antioch. To be informed of the need of other people in distant places, brings great blessing to those who give as well as those who receive. Giving of their means to relieve the needs of other saints is consistent with the description of "a peculiar people, zealous of good works." There was no stated amount or proportion mentioned in this passage of scripture. "According to their ability" and "as God has prospered him," are not really all that different in meaning. It does tell us of our responsibility to use our means for the benefit of others, not just for our own self-interests. Later in Acts we learn this assembly was interested in following the early teaching they had received, and that led them to send some of their own servants, Barnabas and Saul, out to evangelize in further parts of the world. Changes did take place in Antioch that have affected the outward thrust of the Gospel, and we are being benefited today from what they practiced then. The word "Christian" used as an unimportant nickname at the first, is a well-known and well-respected designation of those who belong to Christ when it is used properly today.

To be a "believer" means there is someone on whom I have faith.
That designation is given to those God has saved by His grace.
It is not just a title but is a fact, I know who I have received -
The Person is the Lord Jesus Christ, it is in Him I have believed.

A "disciple" means I am learning from One I'm called to follow.
The word "disciple" without a "Lord" or "Master" sounds so hollow,
Because the process goes on daily as the Master continues to teach
With the objective that in the future, disciples the Gospel will preach.

"Witnesses" are those who know what they've experienced and seen.
Their testimony is used even in courts to settle arguments between
Opposing parties when witnesses tell publicly what they know.
Witnesses for the Lord are chosen to testify with grace, and mercy show.

Disciples were called "Christians," at first it was almost a joke.
But soon it was through "Christians," God to the people spoke.
Now it is a great honor for such a name publicly to bear -
With respect, integrity and dignity we that name can bear.

To some people "saints" are those who are already dead.
In the Bible saints are those separated to our risen Head.
We have to be different when we follow in the steps of the Savior.
Saints are known by the uniqueness and dignity of behavior.

"Father, in Thy mercy help Thy servant to dignify such honorable titles as the scriptures give to those who are in Thy family. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 11:23. *"Who when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord."*

THE ENCOURAGER.

The first thing he saw was God's evident grace
In the people from Greece, who the Gospel believed.
He exhorted them all, that in that very place,
They would purpose in heart to the Lord they would cleave.

Barnabas, the encourager, was a man full of faith;
The Holy Spirit filled him, and as he did teach
The word of God prospered, many more in that place,
Were added to the Lord whom the Gospel did reach.

These folks became known to the public as "Christians."
Their works too, made it clear that the faith they did own;
Was truly of God as gifts they sent to the brethren
In need in Judea so clearly has shown.

Teacher, encourager, missionary, friend;
Barnabas, was all and far more beside;
He was giver and sharer, he was all that and then,
He became leader of Mark a true, faithful guide.

God help us to find some real good men,
Like Barnabas and Saul, to leave for God's people,
Living examples, so that following them,
We would find living proof of that powerful word, Christian.

"I have been with some fine men Father, who have the desire and ability to encourage others. They are in need of encouragement. Help me do this. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 11:29-30. *"Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea: which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul."*

ACCORDING TO HIS ABILITY.

These people were now marked - the Antioch experience had set them apart.
"Christian" now is a term of respect, but it was a reproach back at the start.
There is evidence though that they weren't just a group separated -
They were following the mandate and from God's plan never deviated.

Each person was different, some had more to give and some had less.
The amount we have to give doesn't determine our righteousness -
There was a need and each one gave what they could as unto the Lord.
Giving is not dictated or advertised - when need arises give what you should.

They were called believers because of their faith and its obvious result.
They were brethren known by their love, the number 1 item in the Spirit's fruit.
They were disciples in the process of practicing and learning -
And they were called saints because in holiness they were yielding.

Each title or name gives to God's people a unusual uniqueness,
They are actively involved but maintaining a spirit of meekness.
When a need comes whether prayer is needed and gifts of money,
We can pass on in God's name from the degree of our bounty.

"Keep me, O God, from comparing what one might give with what another gives. It is my business to give from my ability and leave the amounts given or kept by others to themselves. May I always be ready to give according to my ability. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 12

DELIVERANCE

Inserted in the account of the work of the Holy Spirit in the church and, through God's people the spread of the Gospel, is an illustrative account to show us an inside view of an assembly. This chapter ends the part of the book of Acts where Jerusalem is the focal point of the work. Enemies of God who are manipulated by the devil were, and are today, at work to stop the impact of the Gospel on the people. Whether Herod was trying to consolidate his authority in Jerusalem, or whether he thought the expanding church was a threat is not stated. But one can imagine that when healing miracles and supernatural power was evident wherever

God's people were found, he would want to demonstrate his authority over them. Most bullies want to hurt, maim or kill to impress others and to dominate them. The power of the risen Christ he took as a challenge to his position.

For His own sovereign reason, the Lord allowed the death of James. All the believers in Jerusalem would again be made conscious of the fact by the death of James (John's brother), that the enemies of God's people were not going to leave God's work alone and unchallenged. There are times when we need to take extraordinary action in prayer to deal with extraordinary opposition. When Peter was arrested, they realized James' death was not an isolated incident. The prayer meeting was no casual midweek prayer meeting like so many seem to think of assembly prayer meetings today. Some believers testify by their absence that they do not think it is very important to come together at the throne of grace and pray as one voice. The prayer meeting in Jerusalem was an urgent, fervent, constant appeal to the Lord as the saints gathered at the throne of grace "to obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." To some of God's people prayer is a secondary exercise that comes behind their business and pleasure or other things they want to do - until a life or death issue arises.

Herod's apparent intention was to strike at the leaders of the church - the apostles - probably hoping the other believers would abandon the faith. By deliberately dealing with Peter publicly at the same season of the year and in the same way the Lord Jesus Christ was treated before He died, he hoped the whole movement would be stopped. The Passover was just past and Peter was to be brought to trial the next day. Some lessons in life we learn best are learned when there is no solution expected but God miraculously intervenes. Peter was peaceful in his sleep because he had learned Herod didn't have the power to kill him by the sword. The Lord Jesus had told him earlier he would die when he was old with his arms stretched out, girded by another and carried. The way he was delivered from prison this time was different than the first time it had happened to John and him. Now he was chained between two soldiers, and soldiers were guarding the door. But this time the light went on in the prison, an angel poked him in the ribs and told him to get up quickly and get dressed. By the time the angel and Peter were a street away from the prison, he finally realized this wasn't a dream he was having. This was a real deliverance.

There are times in our lives when we are resigned to what we think is inevitable, and then God changes everything. In a moment of time, or in some significant conversation our whole life is changed. A doctor may say, "I find no further evidence of cancer." Or you are informed that someone has taken care of your serious problem. What you were sure was going to stop everything is no longer a threat. All we can do at such times is to thank God for His abundant mercy. When a sick or lost child is delivered to us safely again, we find no difficulty thanking God with tears for His great love wherewith He loved us.

Still, it is possible to pray without expecting results from our petitions. There is a sense of relief when we unburden ourselves before God. By expressing our concern for others when we pray together with prayers of intercession, we may think this is all that can be done. When answers come that are "exceeding abundant above all that we can ask or think," we find ourselves like those Jerusalem brothers and sisters - astounded beyond belief that prayer worked. The power of God was at work for us and we are ashamed that we doubted God. God is working for us to do His own will. His answers are not always what we expect. At times the wonders of God are just more than our minds can conceive. One thing about this illustrative incident recorded in Luke's account that we can learn from is that nothing is impossible with God. Don't take any difficulty - or blessing - for granted. Of all the marvelous things that happened in that assembly of saints, this one is written down to remind us of God's on-going interest and involvement in our lives.

A defeated Herod gave up his challenge for the moment and went back to Caesarea where Cornelius lived and worked. In an attempt to impress his constituency, and in their attempt to flatter him, he made a speech that would never be forgotten by them. While he was speaking, he was eaten from the inside and died a terrible death. God's glory He will not give to another. In vain do the powers of men seek to stop the sovereign plans of God. But people will try and try again - and they are still doing that today. To many of the leaders of the world, and the rank-and-file as well, it is impossible to accept the fact they are under the authority of the unseen God. We do not wrestle against principalities and powers. They are under the control of spiritual wickedness in high places. We dare not lower our guard in any way when things seem to be smooth and comfortable. Let us be vigilant as we see the enemies of God trying different and subtle ways to destroy the work of God. Most of all, let us be fervent in prayer and diligent in our calling to serve our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 12:1-2. *"Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword."*

HARD TIMES.

It is not always easy to stand for the truth, because evil forces around us abound.
Troubles will come to best of all men in whom God's message of truth is found;
For the foe that we face is not one who will quit, when the sword of battle is drawn.
His tactics will change to create panic and fear, and it is now that tough faith must be shown.

When the pressures come on and the need arises to be able in faith to take shock;
It is then we will know like those gone on before; the reality of our trust in The Rock.

In these hard times, like those in the past, we must experimentally learn fervent prayer.
That kind of prayer is not like a stroll in the park, but like a race to be won fair and square.
This attitude of prayer goes beyond what is casual, similar to one keeping ahead of a storm.

In intensity it's like trying to keep one from jumping to death, rather than jumping out of a bed that is warm.

It involves concentration, like one landing a plane in weather that can result in a crash.
In hard times like these we pray harder to God, and are hopeful the danger will soon pass.

In hard times like these we need strong leadership, those who will keep God's people informed.

High morale among saints is not an accident that happens, but comes from those who go beyond norm.

People need to know they are important to all, and what affects one affects others alike.
So when one of God's people is suffering hard times, strong leadership helps make burdens seem light.

We know each member of the body of Christ is unique, each one has been singularly gifted by God.

Those who go before in times that are hard, are the ones who can speak for the Lord.

Common sense is another way God's people can handle the pressure of hard times they live in.

It is not just an accident when right choices are made, lest our feet slip and we fall into sin.
Look around you and see the situation you're in, and consider what God wants you to do.
Usually the answers to the problems we face are not far away, but are right there next to you.

Hard times are a fact of the life of a saint, they will come, so the wise will prepare.
Rest assured that when temptations occur, God will allow only what you are able to bear.

“O Divine Helper: thanks for being near in every circumstance and assuring us of an answer to every need. If the answer is “no”, I will accept that by the help of Thy grace. If the answer is “yes”, I will seek by Thy power to press ahead in faith. If the answer is “wait”, I will ask for the needed patience to not get jumpy. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Acts 12:25. *“And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname is Mark.”*

THE MINISTRY.

Needs will arise, and it is no surprise, that not just everyone can handle the funds.

Those who have been tried, tested and wise, should care for those needs when they come.

It is truly a ministry, not just some little soliloquy, to dispense what others give with good care.

Use your most suited men, pass the responsibility on to them, and give them the burden to bear.

Not novices or the “lightweight” have the ability a ministry to take, where the temptations are to sin are strong.

Choose not one but two, the both of them who, will not allow any funds to go wrong.

When their task is complete, ask them to repeat, what they did with the ministry they were given.

Let the saints be assured, the labor of love they endured, has been used on earth to bring honor in heaven.

Give credit where credit is due, and when that particular work is through, let them then get back to their calling.

Likely that work too will expand, because each of those men, will be known as leaders worth following.

“I know, Father God, the pressures and temptations to use money given in a wrong

way. We now have these funds made available to use in the work of the Lord and I need to be assured of where You would have these put to use. Would it be possible, to in some way, let indications be given to us regarding needs in other areas we should be considering? When this evidence comes let all of us who are involved be of one mind in the dispensing of these funds. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 13:1-3

THE WORK

Responding to the direction of the Holy Spirit, there were a number of teachers in the Antioch assembly who were recognized by their gift and they ministered to the needs of the saints. These men were from different walks of life and different nationalities. Two were from African nations. Two were educated by different philosophers. One was taught in the house of Herod of Galilee and one at the school of Gamaliel, a very prestigious school of learning. Barnabas from Cyprus was a noted person among the assemblies of Jerusalem and Antioch for his heart for the people and his ability to encourage the saints. This variety of gifted men must have been a great asset to the assembly. God gifts people as He sees most fitting to the need of a local assembly. The ministry a teacher gives, and the effectiveness of his teaching among the people of God is one way divinely given qualifications are recognized by the others in the assembly. The work of God isn't done by just a few of one nationality, once culture or one family. The diversity of need in a work makes the diversity of gift, racial background and culture suitable to the need.

Differences in people does not hinder the work of God, but rather expands the work. We should never allow differences because of ethnic or racial background to interfere with the work the Lord intends to be done. When we look upon the people of the Lord as God sees them, that will override prejudice, preconceived opinions and cultural barriers to where we can honestly appreciate each other and have open and heart-felt fellowship together. In order to reach lost souls and effectively connect with believers, we need to be able to rise above any previous barriers made by men.

It is interesting that the Holy Spirit did not direct the oversight of the assembly at Antioch to designate a special destination for Barnabas and Saul to go to. Neither did He limit the kind of labor in which they were to be engaged. Rather it was "the work" to which they were sent. This was not a general call to do what they wanted. The Holy Spirit took them from the work they were sharing with others and sent them to the special work He had for them. Service for God is not a private matter. When one is doing what God has given them to do, waiting for the guidance of God may open other doors of service. Spiritually minded, and spiritually guided brethren will confirm in a positive way or confirm in a negative way what a person has an exercise about. Saul knew what the Lord had for him to do right from the beginning of his Christian life. Ananias of Damascus had been told by the Lord Saul was to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel even before Saul was baptized. Involved in a call to spend all of one's time in the work is an assurance in one's self that this is what God wants for me. This is God's will. But more are involved than one. Others in the assembly in which one is found will have a similar assurance that God want them to send called ones to "the work" with the "right hand of fellowship." This keeps any commendation from being a religious form of mans' ordination. Such a worker is sent out to "the work" by divine appointment and confirmed by those who have the mind of God about the matter.

Serving the Lord without accountability is not scriptural. God calls individuals and they are assured of the backing in prayer and interest by the Lord's people as they are sent out by the Holy Spirit. Assemblies of Christians who send out laborers into the harvest, pray for God's blessing on the work they are going to do and ask the Lord to prosper their work. The laborer has to be careful to use the gifts he has been given and how those gifts are used. He must be careful to not misuse the authority God gives to carry on the work. When a person leaves to serve in different places, they still represent the assembly from which they were sent. It is wrong to "lay hands" on just anyone who just wants to do what he wants to do. There should be reason on the part of others to believe God has called a person to do their work in a proper manner and persevere in that work - not to quit.

Those who go forth to further the work are "recommended to the grace of God" for the work set before them. To insist on the Lord's servant remaining in one place is not implied or demanded. To forbid a person to stay in one place is not demanded either. "The work" in one person's hands may be quite different from that of another person. Each called and sent out person needs to do what they do "as unto the Lord, and not unto men." The results of any work depend on God. The principle of outreach often is one "plants," another "waters, but in every case, it is God who gives the increase.

Acts 13:35. *"Be it known unto therefore, men and brethren that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:"*

THIS MAN #2.

Right from the beginning of His public début,
The uniqueness of the Savior was clear.
His wisdom was heard; was seen in full view;
The God-Man with all wisdom was here.

To see all that He did and hear all that He said;
Made people wonder at the truths He did bring.
From the time of His birth till He rose from the dead,
They questioned how "This Man" did all these things.

"Never man spake like this Man," some said when they came,
For His words brought to them truth and life.
Even Pilate, when he heard Him who men came to blame;
Had to say, "This Man hath done nothing amiss."

"No fault in this Man" was the verdict he passed,
As before the mad crowd the judge stood.
"Away with this Man" they shouted en`mass;
When they rejected the Savior and Lord.

Even when "This Man" died on the cross in my place,
The testimonies came so clear from men's mouths
A malefactor's words, "He has done nothing amiss;"
Seemed to be ignored when they were heard by the crowds.

The centurion and those men who crucified Him;
When they saw Him and heard what He said;
Even though Christ-rejecters were all around them;
Said, "Truly This Man is the Son of God."

On-going today His influence still spreads,
Wherever the Gospel is preached.
"From This Man is preached the forgiveness of sins."
And world-wide many souls are reached.

Unseen to our eyes but made plain when we pray,
Is an assurance that is best understood;
Each act that we do and the words that we say;
Is received by "This Man's unchangeable priesthood.

"O God my Father in heaven, I am reminded that the One who came down from heaven, was the Son of Man and is now ascended into heaven. To be reminded of the fact that "This Man" was here among men, encourages me in presenting the Gospel because He knew what it was like when His words were ignored. But I am thankful to be assured again that His word is not going to return void or useless. Amen."

Acts 13:4-52

THE HAND OF THE LORD

When Barnabas and Saul left the brethren and sisters of the Antioch assembly for the work set before them, they had the assurance of the fellowship of the saints. The hands of identification have been laid on them by the Christians at Antioch and it would have been a comfort to know that even though separated by miles and among those of different cultures, they were supported by the intercession of faithful believers. Each place they visited was different, but in each place, they preached "the word of God" - the message was the same. John Mark was there to take care of day to day needs while Barnabas and Saul pressed ahead with "the work."

The interest of the government official, Sergius Paulus, was such that he wanted to hear the word of God in a personal setting. It is not uncommon where and when God is working, for the devil to oppose in whatever way he can. Elymas, the sorcerer was a man under the domination of the power of darkness. Such people will seek to divert the interest and attention of those who hear the Gospel away from "the faith." The body of truth we preach and the One we represent when we preach the word of God, is greater than any power that can come against God's word. "In vain doth earth and hell oppose, for God is stronger than His foes."

Some brethren like John Mark, find the pressure of different cultures, different languages and even different

weather to be more than they want to accept. When Mark left those he was helping, to return to Jerusalem, apparently, he didn't even want to go to Antioch from where they left - he just wanted to go home. One person may not always adapt to the pressures others willingly accept. The difference between them usually is what one knows is the will of God for them and the degree of commitment to that. An act of failure to be committed to follow another person's lead does not close the door of service and usefulness forever. Mark did regain the respect of Paul and was later asked to join Paul in the work again. In the meantime, he did what he could with Barnabas. It may be there are learning times that have to be gone through before one is able to be very effective in serving God. By keeping in touch with such people who have potential, and interceding on their behalf before God, they can be used again in the service of the Lord.

In places where the Lord leads His servants to take the Gospel, we can trust Him to open doors for the preaching of the word of God. The preaching of Paul was very similar in style and content to the preaching of Peter. That is to be expected wherever the Gospel is preached in fellowship with the Holy Spirit and according to the truth of scripture. In the synagogues there was opportunity given to Paul to speak and he immediately identified himself with the audience by his use of the words "our fathers." This is important when we seek to connect with people. They need to know we are not talking down to them but recognize ourselves as one of them. Paul knew how the Jews thought about the covenant God had made with their nation. The brief history of the nation from Abraham to David opened the subject of the last one of David's seed - Jesus. He was the One who fulfilled the royal line of kingship. There would be no more to come in the kingly line of David because the Lord Jesus will reign forever. The reference to John as the one who would announce the coming of the Messiah would have been familiar to any Jews who knew the Old Testament scriptures.

When the Gospel is preached, the facts of Jesus and His resurrection are still essential truths to be presented as proof of God's satisfaction with the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is also important to use the scriptures as the basis of what we teach. This message is not something we have decided to pass on, but it is that message God has given. Paul spoke plainly of the death and resurrection of Christ, emphasizing that forgiveness of sin and justification comes through faith in "this Man." In preaching the Gospel, warnings must be given also, as to the consequences of refusing to believe the message of salvation and the Person the message is about.

An interest on the part of those who hear the Gospel, deserves an on-going effort to reach as many people as possible in that place of interest. When there are earnest inquirers, we need to take every opportunity to reach them and explain the word of God over and over. Paul had carefully and historically put the Old and New Testament teaching in order and in a spiritual context. He began his teaching where the audience was, and then brought them subject by subject to where he wanted them to be. He applied his teaching on forgiveness in a way in which the Jewish audience was familiar. He then made the supreme sacrifice of Christ plain to them so they would know forgiveness and justification by faith, is in Christ alone. The law could neither forgive nor justify. Everything about it was temporary and for the purpose of making people aware of their need of God - not religious ordinances. A warning is given again in this chapter to those who refuse to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Those who were awakened by the Holy Spirit followed Paul and Barnabas to hear the message of God's grace. They did not follow them to give them worship or the place of Lord. The impact of that one message affected the whole city. That doesn't happen very often but when it does it stirs the hearts of those preaching to be bold for the Lord in spite of opposition. What a blessing it was to the Gentiles when they also were included in the message of salvation by grace. Gentile nations are still being blessed by the light of the Gospel, while for the most part the Jews still choose to remain bound to their traditions. When confronted by truth, that disturbs and convicts people of sin, the response often is not only to personally reject the Gospel of Christ, but to also seek to keep others from hearing it.

The Spirit of God is still working in our day pressing on the consciences of many, and many still push that conviction away by any means possible. We are responsible to preach the word of God, not to make people accept it. People have to make their own decision as to what they are going to do with Jesus. It may be that some will be ashamed and convicted by their actions, and God will grant them again an opportunity to repent and believe the Gospel. Others who are adamantly opposed and continue in that way, will have to suffer the consequences of their own decisions. When it comes to the response to the Gospel, we have to leave that to God and the person who hears.

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: and by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."*

PREACHED UNTO YOU.

“Preached the forgiveness of sins:” what does this mean to me?
By the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ alone can this blessing possibly be.
No man has the authority to forgive - only He who knows every one;
When He says your sins are forgiven, then you really know it is done.

“Continue in the grace of God:” forgiveness is only a start.
The grace of God is needed for living, it's the attraction in a believers' heart.
A truly forgiven person, sincerely wants his Lord to please -
And to pass on from him to others, what he in faith has received.

“Hear the word of God:” not some trivial message from men.
God through Christ has spoken and the Spirit makes us born again.
The word gives assurance to all that what God gave to me is real -
And the Holy Spirit Himself, is the believers' assurance and seal.

“The word of the Lord was published:” this comes from the highest source.
This is not something we dare ignore; the Lord's word has a given course.
I can't take it or leave it on a whim, because it came to me from God -
May I never consider the thought to turn from the Word of God.

“Father in heaven, this clear presentation of Thy Word in such a powerful way is a reminder that Thy Word was proclaimed every time Paul spoke. He was clear in the way he applied it and it had the desired result. Tonight, we are going to present the Gospel again in this place. May some of the people here be like the people there when Paul preached: “glad... glorified the Lord... believed... filled with joy.” I ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Acts 14:1-20

THE WORD OF HIS GRACE.

What a blessing it is when those who serve the Lord in the work of the Gospel are able to work together in harmony and with a united objective. Paul and Barnabas "went together" and were bold in their testimony as they presented "the word of His grace." Their boldness wasn't just the aggressive, in-your-face style of many. Their boldness was in the Lord. Teamwork is a principle that we can follow throughout the scriptures when we trace the work of God. Moses, Aaron and Joshua were together in the work, each with different roles but the same objective. The Lord Jesus Himself had those with Him when He was involved in His public ministry. Teamwork is done by several people each doing a part but subordinating personal prominence to make the work in their hand efficient.

Love for God, for each other, for the work itself and for the souls of men and women promotes a loyalty and unity in action. A division of labor is needed so redundancy is avoided. The value of a united effort strengthens each one when opposition comes as it did in Iconium. The operation of commitment to the word of His grace follows the same pattern, with the same objectives the Lord Jesus had - the Gospel to every creature. Paul and Barnabas, who are both called apostles in this chapter for the first time, used the same method the Lord used. On some occasions the best way to deal with opposition is to just move on to other places. Other times we must stay and press ahead in spite of obstacles and even confrontation. Their vision, as ours should be, was that every person is important and their attitude was they were servants of the Lord and served Him by serving people.

When we do the work to which God has called us, it deserves our very best effort with the very best results in view - the fulfillment of the commission the Lord gave. Therefore, in communicating the message of salvation we must do so with warmth and sincerity. The people we speak to can sense our attitude toward them. Our message should be accurate with scriptures to back up our comments. When Paul spoke to the Gentiles, his message came from a different perspective than that when he spoke to the Jews. To the Gentiles he pointed out their responsibility to the God of creation, not the God of Jewish history. There is great value in keeping calm and composed when speaking in spite of any disruption that might be caused by those in opposition. In Lystra there was a flattering comparison of the preachers to the gods the people of Lyconia were familiar with. Paul used this comparison to present the truth of the Gospel. To speak to people on a friendly and familiar basis, is one way people who hear the message, know we really care for them.

The healing miracle of the crippled man who truly believed he could be healed, provided the spring-board that Paul and Barnabas needed to reach the whole city in a short time. It was so kind of God to open an effective door to them right after they had been threatened with stoning in Iconium. Now in the place where

there had been such adulation, these same fickle people were easily moved to stone them to death. A big beginning and great enthusiasm of people when the Gospel is first preached does not mean a whole lot in the long run. It is the lasting effects of the Gospel that are important. A crest of enthusiasm can quickly be replaced with opposition when there is no lasting results from a movement. What really counts are those faithful few who remain and continue on in the ways of the Lord and the truth of God's word in spite of opposition.

God has left every person in the world with the testimony of rain and crops that grow to feed mankind. When presenting the Gospel, it is a good thing to point out evidence of God that can be seen right where the listeners are. God is at work in the world. The approval of people may make us feel good, but we always need to make our decisions on the basis of "the word of His grace.," not the appeal or approval of the crowd. The Lord Jesus "did not commit Himself to them, because He knew what was in man." Our guidance must come from God. These apostles were committed to obey God in spite of the cost to themselves. What a stir it must have caused when the ones they left for dead outside of Lystra, returned with the marks of stoning upon them and stayed overnight. There is a time to go and preach, a command to fulfill, a time to move on and a time to return to support those God has saved in a community.

Acts 14: 3. *"Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of His grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands."*

What was important, the signs or the grace,
That those men spoke to those in their day?
As they traveled the world going on place to place,
What gave proof to the words they did say?
The signs and the miracles, the healings and all,
Were good things for the people to see.
But the word of His grace spoken with power shall
Convince the hearers when they gave testimony.

When the Lord Himself was here among men,
People marveled at the gracious words that He spoke.
They saw His miracles; tasted miracle bread;
But it was the truth of His words their will broke.
Grace from His lips gave testimony then;
That He had come down from above.
The truth that He taught was the way that those men
Had learned and were convinced of God's love.

Like the Lord when he was here in the body of flesh,
And the apostles who faithfully scattered the seed;
We are responsible now to all those we can reach,
To preach the word of His grace we received.
It was by the word, not the miracles, I was convinced,
Of the greatness of the Person I need.
It is word of the Lord that will each argument clinch
To the skeptic who will not to miracles heed.

The word of His grace reaches the heart and the mind,
Touching emotions and intellect - both.
In the scriptures of truth is where the Person we find,
That brings life and peace to those living on earth.
Those things that He said when salvation He brought,
Is the assurance that the message is true.
When we speak for the Lord - give the truths that He taught;
Then through them, the Lord Himself we will know.

"O God of all grace, and Father of all that believe: I am seeking Thy help that today when I speak, it will be the word of Thy grace people hear. If these stiff lips of mine cannot form the gracious words they should speak, then keep me silent. If this heart of mine is not melted and graceful, then work Thy work of heavenly anointing that there will be evidence of the truth of the words of Thy grace. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 14:17. *"Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."*

NOT WITHOUT WITNESS

Does He do it like in those days or is there another way?
Then He used men who were more than willing to be used -
Today He uses men who God's will and ways do choose.
Then they helped the man who was obviously in need -
Today it is the same, when to other's need, we heed.
Then they identified themselves as simply men -
Today we also testify no matter where or when.
Then they preached to reach the conscience and the heart
Today we preach the Gospel which is the same message as at the start.
Then they spoke of God and His witness in creation -
Today we are called upon to speak of God's salvation.
Then they used points of interest that were common to those people -
Today we speak of Christ who looks on all men as equal.
So, the message we have to tell is the same as the apostles -
May our lives and messages be as living and read epistles.

“Father, I learn from these brethren the value of using everyday opportunities to teach Thy Gospel using everyday illustrations people can easily understand. I am asking Thee to please bring into my mind and heart ways to stress the Gospel message tonight so people will respond now to the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for them on the cross of Calvary. I pray in His name, Amen.”

Acts 14:21-28

THEY RETURNED

There was a very contagious enthusiasm in Paul and Barnabas as they went from one city to another preaching the Gospel. Whenever we preach the Gospel to others, the response is often dependent on how earnestly and compassionately it is given. Commitment to the Gospel message itself and to the people to whom we present it is never totally fulfilled. The first responsibility is to preach the Gospel as effectively as possible. To follow up the work is an essential part of Gospel work. New converts need some personal attention right away. Direct them to the word of God and have them read aloud appropriate verses of scripture to assure them that this is the way God speaks to them personally. Confidence in the new believer will come from what God says far more than what they have experienced or feel in themselves.

Those two apostles who had just escaped being stoned in Iconium and were stoned in Lystra and probably left for dead, knew their work in those cities was not done. In spite of the potential and real dangers, they went back to establish those new believers in the faith. What impact the appearance of Paul and Barnabas must have had on them! Those men in their love for Christ and those new saints, were willing to risk their lives in order to strengthen the souls of God's people for daily living right where they were. Their souls would have been lifted and they would be encouraged to go on for God even in the face of opposition.

New believers have the need, and the right, to expect the strengthening presence of those who brought them the Gospel. Preachers of the Gospel need to fulfill the commission. We do not belong to ourselves, but to the Lord, and if called to endure some inconvenience, hardships or suffering, thank God for the privilege of being identified with our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul and Barnabas knew they faced danger but they knew it was much more important that they encourage the Lord's people. Not every task we are called to do will be easy or convenient. The fact remains that discipleship costs - many different kinds of costs. It will certainly cost us in time to support the saints of God. Financial costs, personal interest costs, comfort costs - even truth itself has costs, but it is worth paying these costs to help our brothers and sisters. None of these costs should keep us from the urgency of the tasks we have been called to do for the Lord's sake.

New work takes time to bring about order and to delegate responsibility in a scriptural way. The recognition of leaders among the saints is an important part of the responsibility of those who bring the Gospel to an area in which a new assembly is planted by God. When confirming the believers in the faith, it would be unfair to not make them aware of the difficulties that lie ahead of them. Tribulation, opposition and disappointments happen. But we must persevere in spite of all that may come against us for the sake of our Lord who gave Himself for us. The recognition of elders who the Holy Spirit has raised up is usually done by identifying those who have already shown a care and concern for the Lord's people. By pointing out those whom God has obviously appointed saves from a lot of envy, jealousy and discontent.

Paul and Barnabas went back over all those assemblies in Galatia they had seen established and consistently did the same work in each place. Not every assembly is alike and not every one has the same need. But some things are the same in "all the churches," such as a functioning oversight and the on-going teaching of the word of God. Paul probably wrote the book of Galatians after they returned to Antioch and during the time they were there with their commending assembly. Each of the assemblies in Galatia would

have authority from him (the written word of God) to deal with the efforts of the Judaizers who were trying to get the assembly believers back under Jewish authority. By the time those Judaizers had come to Jerusalem, the Galatian believers would have read the letter from Paul (probably the first of the epistles). Peter had brought the Gospel to Cornelius and his household, who were the first of the Gentiles saved, but now, by Paul and Barnabas, the door had been opened to the Gentiles and assemblies were established in the Gentile world.

Back again? What is the reason?
Teaching the word of God is needed in every season.
Early in the life of faith it is necessary to confirm
The new believers so they will personally learn
Truths to strengthen their faith in God
Which can only come from knowing the Word
So, the doubts and fears that too often come
Are settled when they see for themselves what God has done.

Back Again? Yes, so that those brethren who lead
Will be assured that all the Lord's people who need
To know who leads the flock have divine authority
To make decisions, but not with a sense of superiority.
As under-shepherds guide with care and concern -
The shepherds themselves also need to learn
How to meet the needs of those who look to them -
To speak for the Lord Jesus, they should know more of Him.

Back again? The assembly gathers together to hear
Those who came first and on who hearts they bear
The weight that love places in them for those
Who in spite of opposition, know when they chose
To follow Christ, and the pattern of scriptural teaching
And in turn, took the responsibility of Gospel preaching -
Now under pressure by those around to conform -
Refuse to do so, and the doctrine of God they adorn.

Back again? Some day that visit will be the last -
And to others who followed, the baton is passed.
Faces that one time were familiar to the people here,
No longer are seen and new leaders will appear
To meet the need of God's people of the next generation -
And urge them to carry on the work in faith and dedication.
Sometimes we might question what all the effort is worth -
We wonder, when the Lord comes, will He find faith on the earth?

"Father, I know I come here often, but the Lord's people seem to appreciate us coming to teach the Word. Give Thy servants further opportunities to meet the needs and serve the people wherever Thou wilt guide us. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 15:7. *"And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, 'Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the Gospel, and believe.'"*

THE WORD OF THE GOSPEL.

From the voice of the Savior on the mountain, in the cities, on the sea -
Came the word of the Gospel.
In private conversations, in the night or by a well, in a home or by a tomb -
Came the word of the Gospel.
At the supper with the emblems on the table, in the upper room with sorrowing men -
Came the word of the Gospel.
To the priests, to the judge, to the thief dying on a cross, to the centurion and his men -
Came the word of the Gospel.
On the road to Emmaus, in the room with closed doors, to men at breakfast by the sea -
Came the word of the Gospel.
On the mountain of ascension, last words to those He was leaving to do His work -
Came the word of the Gospel.

On the streets of Jerusalem in a multitude of strange languages, every one there -
Heard the word of the Gospel.
In front of Jewish judges, in front of Romish leaders, in front of godless kings; all -

Heard the word of the Gospel.
 In Jerusalem and Judea, in the towns of Samaria, spreading as far as Antioch; people -
 Heard the word of the Gospel.
 In Damascus, in Turkey, in all of Asia Minor, in large cities and small towns; they -
 Heard the word of the Gospel.
 In the desert a traveler to Ethiopia, on an island a tribal leader, by a river; seekers -
 Heard the word of the Gospel.
 In jails and courtrooms, in dungeons and palaces, in meetings and markets; a generation -
 Heard the word of the Gospel.

In the catacombs and arenas, in groups small and large, in secret and in public: believers
 Tell the word of the Gospel.
 Across Europe and Asia, in the Middle East and Far East, in jungles and cities of Africa -
 Tell the word of the Gospel.
 In North America and South, in Central America and the islands across the seven seas -
 Tell the word of the Gospel.
 In the cold of the far north and south, in jungles steaming with heat, in teeming cities -
 Tell the word of the Gospel.
 To the children and the aged, to the rich and the poor, on the farms and in the villages -
 Tell the word of the Gospel.
 Arise and tell, sit down and write, kneel down and pray, lie down and prepare to
 Tell the word of the Gospel.

“These holy truths I am called to tell, Father God, are such an important trust that I dare not ever take it casually. Keep me with a serious but kindly manner. Give to me a mind that is clear and emotions that show. Enable me to speak with clarity and compassion. O God of my salvation, save souls that are hearing the Gospel now: In the name and for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Acts 15:1-35

DEALING WITH DIFFICULTIES

There are prejudices that people have that can jeopardize the freedom we have in Christ. Opinions by certain people from Jerusalem who came to Antioch, threatened to divide the work of God and bring Christians into the place where they would only be another Jewish sect like the Pharisees and Sadducees. Circumcision was an Old Testament sign symbolizing the Jews were a chosen people to God. In Acts 15 we are told about a group of Judaizers who came to Antioch to impose this on the Gentiles thus making them Jewish proselytes. Prejudice dies hard. All of us have a tendency to turn our opinions into rules. Some think their practices are rules that everyone should follow. It is true that biblical principles are for everyone, everywhere, but practices may differ. In one country or culture there may be the practice of women on one side of the room and men on the other. Some may want the breaking of bread meeting before every other meeting on the Lord's Day. There are no rules regarding these practices.

Normally for reasons that only affect us personally, we don't defend ourselves when it is better to avoid unnecessary confrontation. But when new converts are involved and the welfare of the work of God is at stake, we will have to stand up and defend what is in danger of being forfeited by another person's own opinion. New believers are the key to evangelization. They are not a non-issue or like an inanimate object. Each one is a new creature (creation) in Christ Jesus to be appreciated and loved. A yoke of bondage will stop them completely from going ahead in their Christian life. We all know what joy there is when new believers come among us with a desire to follow the Lord and be a part of the assembly.

When problems like the demand to circumcise arises, we need to take steps to preserve the freedom a child of God has. The problem that threatened the early church was not whether Gentiles could be saved, but whether they had to be circumcised to be saved as some of the Jews were insisting. Their opinion was that Gentiles have to submit to Jewish laws and traditions before salvation. It would mean a man had to be circumcised first and then put faith in Christ as Savior. There are similar groups today. Some will insist that a person needs to be christened as a baby before they can ever know they are saved. Others will say baptism by immersion is necessary for salvation. Still others will say that if a person does not speak in tongues, they do not have the Holy Spirit. Christianity is not confined to the opinions of men. There is real freedom in Christ and anyone who comes as a repentant sinner and puts personal faith in Christ alone for salvation, God saves.

These differing opinions have to be faced with grace and wisdom. When Paul and Barnabas, accompanied by some other brethren from Antioch made their way to Jerusalem, they stopped along the way and met with companies of God's people. There was real joy among them when the news of God saving Gentiles and

Gentile churches being established was reported by the apostles. The people of Phenice and Samaria would not have been as prejudiced against the Gentiles as were those men from Jerusalem. A potential split was avoided by the early church leaders meeting to discuss the matter with respect and serious concern. Legality makes it easy for people to act without grace and faith. Traditional carry-overs from formal religions, religious structure and legal requirements from ancient men are not to be imposed on the people of God. We come into the full freedom of grace when we are born again. "Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new."

It is wise to seek a solution to a problem. It is wise to share and hear opinions of others. It is wise to tell others of the work of grace God is doing in other places among people of other cultures. It is wise to give a hearing as to why change is to be considered. It is wise to be able to sum up a problem in as few words as possible. Usually the solution to a problem is found in a well-articulated definition of the problem. After the matter had been argued over and all sides of the matter heard, Peter spoke from personal experience about the power of the word of the Gospel he preached at Caesarea to Cornelius. He testified to the work of the Holy Spirit there and the faith of those who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. He left no uncertainty as to the effect of the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter emphasized what Jews and Gentiles who believe in Christ have in common. There was a lot of weight in the words and testimony of Peter.

When Barnabas spoke, he would have had special impact because he was one of the Jerusalem brethren right at the beginning of the work in Jerusalem and now was involved in the work of the Lord among the Gentiles. They knew him, his character and his personal exercise for the things of God right from the time he sold land and donated it freely to the work of the Lord. His words would have had weight with them all when he told of what had been done among the Gentiles. Paul also spoke and would probably have given testimony to the salvation of the government official, the blindness that came on Elymas, the healing of the cripple and the open doors for the preaching of the Gospel in spite of a lot of opposition. He would no doubt told them of the gathering of Gentile believers as churches in the same way that was done among the assemblies of the Jews.

James would have had a special place among them as the brother of the Lord Jesus. The testimonies of Peter, Barnabas and Paul were very important. James then turned to the word of God as the final test of the truth. We all have opinions, beliefs and experiences we draw from to seek to legitimize our actions. We may even believe inside that everyone should follow what I think is right. However, at the final end of a disputed matter, it must be God's Word to which we all submit. James' judgment of the matter was based on the scriptures he quoted. They all knew those were true. He also appealed to moral principles that are basic to humanity but are often ignored by worldly culture and activity. He also identified the life principles of blood, food polluted by being offered to idols, and the putrefaction of animal flesh that has the blood left in it. These things along with sexual immorality were wrong for believers or would cause unnecessary offense to brothers in Christ. The principle of avoiding what offends others was articulated by James.

It is not enough to bring together diverse people from different historical backgrounds, customs and traditions and meet together as one body in fellowship with one another. The indwelling Holy Spirit in each believer is needed to enable us to do what needs to be done. He can unite what is diverse. He can remove arrogance based on nationality and economic differences. The impact of spiritual people when barriers of any kind are removed, is a powerful testimony to the effectiveness of the Gospel.

To promote and maintain Christian freedom, God uses men who are willing to "hazard their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." Men are God's method of bringing salvation to the world. Tested and proven men who have been courageous in spiritual warfare, are concerned with how people are doing more than what they know. The growth process of believers is confirmed when there are those who can be trusted to give the teaching of the word guided by the Holy Spirit. When people of different backgrounds, social and economic differences, come together in fellowship and love, to worship and serve God, there is much glory brought to God.

Acts 15:14. *"Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name."*

PEOPLE FOR HIS NAME.

What do you mean, "No difference" -
They don't even look like us.
Their speech is entirely different,
And because of them there is all this fuss -
But - they are a people for His name!

Their habits and their customs
Don't blend with what we've always done,
And it seems to some of us
That Jewish people they must become -
But - they are a people for His name!

We always will have differences,
God's people are not from one place -
And it is only right to accept them,
They too are saved alone by grace -
And - they are a people for His name!

Put all God's people together,
And their variety is a real strength -
Each one brings gifts and a heritage
That will be more important as a link -
Because they are a people for His name!

I, for one, am aware, and glad
That God has from every nation -
Brought into His church, both large and local
All kinds of people with a common salvation -
Because they are a people for His name!

“Eternal God, through these years You have brought so many people into the kingdom by the new birth and many into the fellowship of local churches. It is a marvel of divine wisdom and purpose that from so many diverse people over so many years a group of people are known as a people for His name - and I am one of them. I praise Thee for this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Acts 15:36-41

GOD ALLOWS DIFFICULTIES

After Paul and Barnabas returned from Jerusalem with Judas and Silas, who were gifted prophets, there apparently came others from Jerusalem also. Peter must have been in full fellowship with the saints when he came first to Antioch. But when some Judaizers came who kept themselves separated from the Gentiles even when eating, Peter sided with them. They apparently thought the restrictions in the letter written to Antioch from the elders of the Jerusalem still supported their legalistic view of Judaism. The items that were listed in the letter came to humanity before the law of Moses was written. It is possible to take portions of scripture and base opinions on them outside of the context in which they were written. For whatever reason, these people separated themselves from the Gentiles and surprisingly, Peter did also. If he was trying to appease their discontent, or was trying to avoid some confrontation is not really too clear. Paul saw what was happening because he could see the actions of Peter were contradictory to the letter from Jerusalem and potentially would make it of no value. Paul also had apostolic authority and realized he had to act right away, and publicly, to keep the work from dividing. By exposing the fault of Peter before them all, he added further clarification and impact to the Gospel message by stating, "By the works of the laws shall no flesh be justified."

Some things are of fundamental importance cannot be overlooked at all. How instructive and gracious it is that these two brethren did not resent each other because of this incident. Occasionally God allows difficulties or differences of opinions to be aired so that what is His will is more easily understood. Each assembly is an autonomous group of God's people who are directly responsible to God. Jerusalem wasn't a governing headquarters that called the Antioch assembly to come for instruction from them. The brethren in Antioch were the ones who took the initiative in the matter and sent Paul, Barnabas and other brethren to Jerusalem to deal with those who came from Jerusalem and were disrupting the saints at Antioch. Matters of serious importance are often best dealt with face to face, lest there be some who perceive things different than others. A written summation to a problem is always valuable so there can be no question as to what the consensus of opinion was, and what decision was made.

The independence of each assembly can stop the growth of error that has permeated so many denominations today. Some organizations make a "majority rule" decision and thus an issue, good or bad, or even a man-made doctrine, spreads from one place to another. In that way error is used by the enemy to undermine the work of God.

Because Paul and Barnabas stayed at Antioch for quite some time, it should never be supposed they were

idle servants waiting for something to do. They, and others, continued to teach the Lord's people and to "preach the word of the Lord," that would bring encouragement to the believers and understanding of the Gospel to those of that area. It is not inconsequential when the Spirit of God leaves a person in one place for quite awhile. It may be that by this means the Lord's people will be prepared for some eventualities that are unknown to us, and in the future of the work. Even the facts of modernism, the "emerging church," post-modernism are part of the multitude of issues assemblies are faced with today. Governments are becoming more aggressive in trying to bring about a union of small independent churches under one union in order to monitor and ultimately control what can or cannot be said by that group.

Some will bring this about by offering government finances to update assembly buildings and giving special consideration to children's work or some other activity of the local assembly that is for the benefit of the general population of a community. Other city or government groups will place restrictions of one kind or another to pressure the saints of God in the fellowship of that assembly to not do what should be done. This usually finds expression in recent times by restricting distribution of literature, open air meetings or using one's own home for home Bible studies or cottage Gospel meetings.

Whenever there have been pressures to bring about a union of churches, whether they are alike or different, there has been a decline in the spiritual tone of that work. It becomes more popular because compromises are made to accommodate to the wishes of different groups of people. The brethren in Antioch wisely took responsibility for what was going on in their midst. They understood the value of wise counsel from mature teachers. When the written decision was received, they were glad for the clarity brought to the matter. When the decision was tested by one of the most influential preachers, the apostle Peter - and others, action was taken by Paul as a responsible teacher at Antioch, to stop that wrong action right there before it could go any farther.

We may not realize the value of local autonomy as far as the house of God is concerned, until it is tested. Then we can see how important that is as a safeguard from wholesale acceptance of a practice or teaching that is wrong. Wise leaders need to be on their guard at all times lest some unscriptural practices take hold in the assembly and many be defiled. The Sovereign God allowed this and we can learn from it.

Further, but along the same line of instruction from the Spirit of God, comes the difficulty and contention that arose between the two leaders who had shared much in common in their past labors for the Lord. In one way we are saddened by two men who divided over a seemingly unimportant matter as a homesick, scared young brother in Christ. On the other hand, even though both brethren were at fault if any blame is to be placed, the outcome of the matter is that by dividing up into areas of work, more was able to be accomplished. Barnabas went to Cyprus with Mark. Barnabas has personal, as well as a spiritual interest, in Cyprus. Paul went back the more recently established assemblies and took Silas, who was also a prophet, to confirm the word that has been preached there on the previous journey. Paul had a real concern for the testimonies of the assemblies in major centers, that they would be willing to reach out to others. In order to do that, they had to be well taught themselves. The passionate contention between two men was used by God to multiply the benefit to others. Men are men at the best and they are not always what they should be. But God can take what seems to us to be a failure and bring blessing from it. Perhaps both Paul and Barnabas were partly wrong and partly right. Are we obligated to give every person a second opportunity? Is failure to be as committed as we would like a person to be, a reason to disqualify a person from the work of the Lord? The result was that Mark was given a place of importance by Barnabas that he never previously had. At a later time not only was Mark recognized by Paul as a man of value, but he wanted him to join in the work. The Holy Spirit used Mark to write a very effective Gospel that has been a great blessing to many people right to this day. We may never be able to properly value the negative experiences we pass through, but this we know - God allows them. When God allows something to happen that to our thinking shouldn't have happened, our best response is to say, "The will of the Lord be done," and pray for God's blessing on all who are involved. Who really knows this side of heaven what God can accomplish for His glory through those who are available but different?

It is not easy at all to withstand determined men
It is not easy to go out, when everyone else is going in
It is not easy for one person to bring conflict to an end-
But it can be done by the power of God.

It is not easy when others say "Yes," for you to say "No"
It is not easy when pressured to conform for truth to show
It is not easy when others do, for you not to go -
But it can be done by the grace of God.

It is not easy when before you are two ways to take
It is not easy in that situation the right decision to make
It is not easy when you know the right one, a friendship will break -
But it can be done by putting faith in God.

It is not easy to leave a person you have worked with for years
It is not easy to remain true when a divisive spirit appears
It is not easy to move on in spite of sorrow and tears -
But it can be done by the tender mercies of God.

It is not easy to see those you care for drifting away
It is not easy when they pay no heed to what you say
It is not easy to watch when they are going astray -
But it can be done by trusting the hand of God.

It is not easy to trust when God allows bad things to be done
It is not easy when it seems this battle the enemy has won
It is not easy in the darkness to wait for the light of the Son -
But it can be done when we wait for the faithfulness of God.

“Father of all comfort, God of all grace: there are things happening in Thy work, among Thy children and even in my own family that has the tendency to cause me great distress. But I do trust Thee, Father, and by Thy grace commit every one of these issues going on, to Thee. I thank Thee for whatever will bring honor and glory to Thee in the end. Amen.”

Acts 16:1-11

DIVINE GUIDANCE

When the time seemed right for the apostles to leave Antioch to further and carry on the work to which they had been called, they didn't make a hasty decision. After "some days" Paul was quite convinced of the direction the Holy Spirit was guiding them to even though there were no definite stated words from God. This guidance was based on the original guidance given by the Lord when He ascended. "Go... make disciples... baptize them... teach them." Visiting the Lord's people and strengthening them is an important part of the work of the Lord. The Holy Spirit who directs us into the work, also directs us in the work. We are not at liberty to do the work of God in our own way or in a way that just appeals to us. We are the Lord's servants.

The contention that led to two senior missionaries going separate ways, did not hinder the guidance nor the work of the Holy Spirit. When Paul and Silas left Antioch, they were "recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God." There was confidence on the part of those in Antioch in those men and their ability to do what the Spirit was leading them to. Not everything in the service of God is easily understood - especially the difficulties. But those things that at the moment appear to be obstacles, may actually be ways God is guiding us to fulfill His divine intention.

Paul and Silas were guided to stop at each place where the Gospel was preached before, and they were now able to confirm the saints by giving them the truth and the counsel of God. The foundation work of the "apostle and prophet" was being guided by the Spirit, and He was building "living stones" into the church on the right foundation. One of those who had been saved by God's grace when the Gospel was first preached at Derbe and Lystra was Timothy. He was only young when reached by the Gospel at the time Paul and Barnabas were there, but two godly women in his family, Lois and Eunice certainly influenced his spiritual growth and interest in the things of God. His Greek father was probably not a believer and according to Jewish law, there was no reason for Timothy to be circumcised. The reputation of this young man was such that believers in more than one assembly recognized his interest in the things of God. Often the attitude and actions of older Christians have a positive effect on those younger believers in the decision-making time of their lives. Because of the reputation already formed about Timothy among those who lived there, Paul had enough confidence in him to ask him to go with him and Silas in their travels and work. There is something very valuable when an older man and a younger one can bond together and serve the Lord. The wisdom and experience of the older along with the strength and zeal of the younger is a wonderful combination. Even the fact of Timothy submitting to circumcision when it was unnecessary, speaks to the kind of attitude and effective young servant of the Lord has. Perhaps Paul's reason for doing this was for Timothy's future usefulness among Jewish believers.

Updating the various assemblies on the decrees made by the elders in Jerusalem was an important matter. Law keeping, nor anything else should be added to faith as a condition for a Gentile or Jew to be saved. Fornication was prevalent among the Gentiles then as it is today, and it is not acceptable in any way for a

child of God to be involved in any form of this sin. Even common sense tells us it is foolish to eat blood or animal flesh that hasn't been bled because of the danger of decay and disease, let alone the fact that "the life of the flesh is in the blood." God guides us in every aspect of life in ways we may not fully understand at first. He may make His reasons known later, but even if He doesn't, we need to trust Him and His word.

Now there were three men going together to the work in the Galatian assemblies and those in Phrygia. There is a principle of safety in numbers when guided by the Holy Spirit and also a sense of accountability to those with whom we labor. Timothy would have learned by observation and experience how to discern the leading of the Holy Spirit. The negative side was the Spirit forbade them from going to north or east on one occasion. On another occasion the Spirit used a form of appeal to keep them moving westward toward Troas, so on that occasion He "suffered them not" to go into Bithynia. Timothy would learn from observing the Spirit guiding Paul that there are times when we are to comfort God's people. Other times we are to communicate divine truth to the saints in an assembly until the subject is well-learned. On occasion we will also have to lay a charge on the people of God to make sure they teach what is right.

In the process of being guided by God it may be some circumstances direct us to a certain place. Or it may be that some physical ailment or event of nature opens or closes doors for us. By the guidance of God these men were able to open further the work in the area they were in while at the same time were being moved in the direction God wanted. When we are in fellowship with the Lord these things can be discerned. Bithynia and Mysia were not the destination God had in mind for this time. We often look at the many places where the Gospel has not been preached and would like to reach out to those people. But with a recognition of our limitations and our awareness of the Sovereign God knowing every heart, we must commit ourselves to the path before us and the tasks to which we have been called. Not every time God gives guidance is the same as the last time. When "a man" appeared in a vision, whether it was Luke or someone unknown in the vision, Paul knew this was the guidance of God. "Assuredly gathering" the mind of the Lord seems to have been the coming together of circumstances right at Troas. Up until they had reached Troy there had been a degree of uncertainty. This was replaced by positive assurance. Paul was the Lord's man at the right place, at the right time, willing to do the right thing with the right men to help him. Luke joined the team at Troy. There had been a kind of indirect nudging by the Spirit from one place to another until they reached Troas. Now there was no question. Europe, Macedonia in particular was the open door, God had opened in front of them.

As we move from day to day following the leading and guiding of God, we can expect to be pushed one way or another without a lot of drama or assurance to give us confidence in our actions. God intends us to trust Him and His guidance in the small things as well as the big things. When a major event opens before us, we are prepared for it by being faithful to the Lord in the more obscure events of life in which we live most of the time. The person God guides, has the kind of attitude which makes it possible for the Spirit of God to guide him. If we are loyal to the Lord and faithful in responding to present guidance, we can expect Him to continue to guide us in the work we do for Him in the future. By watching for His leading we won't fail under times of disappointment and difficulty. It may be that God will allow us to look back sometime and see the blessings we have received and the dangers we have avoided by following Him "step by step." We don't need supernatural signs. We just need genuine faith in the Lord.

Acts 16:9. *"And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, 'Come over into Macedonia, and help us.'"*

HELP US.

From beyond the borders of our complacency and comfort -
From beyond the apathy created by having "much goods and have need of nothing;"
From beyond the quiet contentment of a Sunday morning gathering for worship;
From beyond the heated and air-conditioned walls of a beautiful sanctuary;
From beyond the safeguards of a nation that guarantees our freedoms;
From beyond the opportunities to advance and make more profit and material gain;
From beyond the enticements of materialism and the softness it creates in us;
From beyond the borders of our nation - from the far parts of the earth:
Comes the call: "Come over and help us."

From the homes of our land where there is so much dysfunction and uncertainty;
From broken hearts of those who have been abandoned and left to fend for themselves;
From the grief-stricken waiting rooms in a thousand hospitals where tears flow daily;
From the sterile bedsides of those who are in pain and others who are slowly dying;
From the children longing and looking for a parent who hasn't come home for days;
From the lonely isolation of one who's loved one has died and is looking at walls;
From those whose memories are all they have left of sons and daughters long gone;
From those for who the flag flies half-mast all day and every day - as it has for years:

Comes the call: "Come over and help us."

From those who have never found the peace they are longing for and looking for;
From those who have been bowing down to idols and images made by man;
From those who pray with heads on the floor several times a day to those long dead;
From those who have terror in their hearts for fear of offending unknown powers;
From those who crawl on hands and knees up steps or on roads praying and hurting;
From those who pay great sums of money hoping for the forgiveness of their sins;
From those who become cynical and hard because of false religion they have seen;
From those who have emptiness within and do not know where to find fullness:
Comes the call: "Come over and help us."

From the silent voices and speaking eyes of those who have listened to the Gospel;
From the bowed head and fearful handshake of those who want salvation but are afraid;
From the strained look of those who are trying to understand the fullness of God's grace;
From the trembling lips of the ones who have prayed over and over, "O God, save me."
From the children sitting beside believing parents and wondering, "How did you get this?"
From the older ones who have been bound by tradition and form and pride and fear;
From the careless person who has suddenly been given a fatal verdict and is awakened;
From the children around the family table who know there is a separation at the Rapture:
Comes the call: "Come over and help us."

"I am afraid, O heavenly Father, that I have not given serious enough thought to the plight of the lost. I really need, and want, to be able to see people as You see them. I know theoretically the danger lost souls are in and yet sometimes I forget the terrible danger before them. In a few hours I am going to be speaking to lost souls in a public meeting. I will shortly speak to some in private. Let me see them through Your eyes. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 16:12-40

THREE DIFFERENT PEOPLE

Luke's introduction into the work of the Lord in spreading the Gospel must have left a great impact on him as he recalls in writing - guided by the Holy Spirit, the events around the introduction of the Gospel into Macedonia. The assurance of Paul as to where to go and when, would have taught him the importance of receiving guidance from God. The scriptures are plain but have to be applied. "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel." Early Christians like Paul had visions that were obviously used by God. "God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night..." Circumstances surrounding daily activities are also ways the Holy Spirit guides us. He closes some doors and opens another to bring us where He wants us. Luke, Silas and Timothy were guided by the initiative of Paul who as a mature believer and an experienced worker in the Gospel, knew by experience how God directs His people. There were times when God spoke inwardly to His servants in subjective ways and they knew from the witness of the Spirit and their own spirit this was the right thing to do.

The team of evangelists passed by the island of Samothracia and the seaport town of Neapolis to reach Philippi, an important center that would suit Paul's previous mode of evangelization. From large centers there were those who would take the Gospel to surrounding towns and villages. God was guiding in this extra eight-mile walk to Philippi because He had previously led a discontented Gentile woman from Thyatira who had been awakened by divine intervention, to leave idolatry and to worship God. Another woman in Thyatira, Jezebel, was the opposite kind of person. Lydia was a sensitive, intellectually astute person who could run an important business enterprise but who had already learned life is not composed of the abundance of things one possesses. There were very few Jewish men in Philippi (10 men were needed for a synagogue), so this lady with others who were conscious of God, did the same as the exiles in Babylon in earlier days - went down by the river and prayed, not sang.

To open the door of the Gospel to Europe, the Lord opened the heart of Lydia first. "Man, looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart." Luke would have seen the impact of the word of God spoken by Paul and would have quickly learned that salvation is "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit saith the Lord." One person who had been previously dealt with by the Spirit of God, was the key to the whole new work of God in that city. We need to be alert today to any evidence of God working in people for that is often the person God will bring to faith in Christ when the Gospel is preached.

Evidence of the reality of professed faith in a person, is the willingness to obey God, and also to see others saved by grace. Lydia's household who also believed on the Lord Jesus Christ were baptized, thus identifying themselves as Christians in Philippi. It is not easy on those who step out on "the first day" in faith

to follow Christ. This gentle lady and her family were not intimidated by wondering what those around would say. She had the authority, interest, willingness and grace to invite four itinerate evangelists to stay in her home and long as they were in Philippi. There are many evidences of genuine faith in new believers. One is love for the brethren. Showing hospitality to the Lord's people, is closely linked as a sign of appreciation for what God has done for us. It probably was in the house of Lydia the new assembly in Philippi met when they gathered together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The riverside might have been the place the four evangelists went to pray on a regular basis at the beginning of the work in Macedonia. One demon-possessed girl who followed them day after day to this place loudly proclaiming the truth of the message they preached. This tactic of Satan is still being used today to undermine the power of the Gospel. The enemy of souls seeks to form alliances with the people of God so the watered-down message appeals to more people. One of the major hindrances to the work of the Lord today is the desire on the part of many so-called preachers of the Gospel to declare a "seeker friendly" message that does not offend people. Whenever this kind of message is preached, we know behind it is the work of satanic powers. Contrast that with the work of the Holy Spirit that brings conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment to come. The words this demon-possessed damsel loudly called out were right. The power and motivation behind them were wrong.

The instantaneous change that came over this young woman was such that there was no question she had been under the control of the powers of darkness. The name of Jesus Christ had such authority, there was no question as to who had the greatest power when the demon immediately left her. The pattern of satanic opposition to the Gospel is the same today as it was in the early days of the work in Philippi. Satan tried to get an alliance going so he could still have control of the people in that city. But there can be no fellowship in any way between "light and darkness, Christ and Belial, or he that believeth with an infidel." When the separation between what is of God and what is of Satan is obvious, Satan will resort to antagonism and open opposition against those who preach the Gospel scripturally. We dare not water down the truth to suit people. It is not right to align the work of God with the work of the world, the flesh and the devil. There were only a few believers in Philippi, but now added to the number was no doubt a young woman who was delivered from the chains of evil bondage and was now free in Christ.

The masters, the multitude and the magistrates were now shown to be controlled by the power of Satan who has a large arsenal of tactics to use against the truth of God. Sometimes he uses subtlety as an angel of light, and other times he goes about as a roaring lion. It is always important that believers, new and old, remember that "greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world." The beating, suffering and imprisonment with chains in the inner prison was not easy in any way to endure. We cannot always avoid the cost and consequences faithfulness to God might bring to us. Our faith is in Him who we trust, and we know He is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." Even in the darkness of the inner prison, and in excruciating pain, these two men, Paul and Silas, expressed their confidence in God by audible prayer and praise. Maybe they sang loudly the first Psalm and the 23rd Psalm along with some new hymns from their own warm souls. Timothy and Luke were probably with the new believers who would have been concerned for the welfare of these two servants of the Lord.

It is a great testimony to God's grace when we can take control of any adverse situation because we know God is really in control of the whole event. Our response to difficulties in such times as opposition brings, is often the most powerful testimony to our message. In those times when we are unable to do a thing, we need to remember "God can do anything but fail." A great earthquake in the middle of the night would have awakened the whole city to the fact that there was something happening in that place over which not even the magistrates had control. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity" one has said. A suicide was avoided that night because of divine intervention through the loud praying and singing of Paul and Silas. Even further God used that incident to bring a whole new group of people under the sound of the Gospel. They even responded to the teaching given and all went out in the night to be baptized and identified with the risen Lord Jesus Christ. When they came back into the jailer's house after the baptism there was joy and fellowship where hours earlier there had been antagonism and suffering. How remarkable it is when God is working in a place to bring "life and immortality to light through the Gospel."

We may never understand why or how God works His will because we do not know the minds and hearts of people. With God there are no limits to the way He expresses the blessings of His grace. In the case of Lydia, God had been working for a period of time to prepare her heart to receive the Gospel when she heard it for the first time. For the young woman under demonic control, God waited many days to bring about the confrontation between darkness and light. In her case the whole city knew about her conversion in contrast to Lydia who was quietly and gently brought to faith in Christ. As far as the jailer and his household, the sleeping city was awakened by the great earthquake as God worked His will in the lives of a large household

of servants and family. "All that were in his house" would have probably included guards and Romans who were stationed there. Even the magistrates had a change of opinion about Paul and Silas that was probably brought about by the great earthquake. God knows what is needed and we are blessed to participate in such a great life-changing work with Him.

It is not wrong to claim legitimate privileges as citizens of a community or a country. These men were probably seeking to keep the new converts from the kind of treatment they received when they refused to leave the prison unofficially as if nothing had ever happened. The laws of the land do protect us and it is not out of order to claim their privileges as well as obey the laws. Luke, on this first venture into the work of the Lord, would have wisely taken account of everything that had happened and learned a whole lot of lessons about what is involved in serving the Lord. He certainly gave a clear account of the variety of people God reached by His grace in Philippi. All of the fundamental truths associated with the Gospel are written in this chapter. A beautiful comment is made at the end when at the house of Lydia, the freed men met with "the brethren" - the assembly of saints, and calmed their fears, eased their concern and spoke words of comfort to the new believers before they left for other parts. And Luke stayed there. What a remarkable humble man he must have been to not identify himself by name. He gracefully only identified his fellowship with those great men by the little word "we." May we learn the value of gracious acceptance of who we are and what we are called to do. Maybe then we too can be called, "beloved."

Acts 16:27-28. *"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. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, 'Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.'"*

AWAKING OUT OF SLEEP.

An unusual event in an unusual place
God's mighty power over creation and sin
A door to the Gospel opened, then prison doors opened
A man's conscience awakened, then his mind and heart opened -
All that one might believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!

Fear, falling stones, breaking rocks - serious abnormal activity
Foundations shaking, walls shaking, knees shaking, men quaking
Chains loosed from walls and bands fall off from hands and feet
A sword pulled from its sheath, a man next door to death -
All that one might believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!

Singing saints - then and now, don't realize the power of a song
Praying people - then and now who really believe God answers prayer
The word of God - then and now in the heart and on the lips of ready men
Voices ready to speak for God - then and now, at a moments notice -
All that one might believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!

It worked just the same - then and now: the songs, the prayers and the Word
Conviction of sin - then and now, is followed by an anxious question
Confident words - then and now, from those who know God and what He can do
Glorious results - then and now, when one receives the word - salvation -
All that one might believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!

"O God, may I never limit, even in my mind, the way I believe Thou dost work to bring about the salvation of a soul. The melodic sounds of a hymn or spiritual song even from a child has a unique power. Prayers from the lips of a saint in touch with Thee, can certainly reach the conscience of an unseen listener. The scripture read in a clear voice - all of these have great power in themselves, how much more when in concert with each other and focused on one person. Remember the ones attending these meetings, O God, and may they recognize Thou art speaking to them in these ways. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 17:1-17

THREE CITIES

One may wonder at the fact that Paul, Silas and Timothy passed through Amphipolis and Appollonia without stopping to preach there until we read that in Thessalonica there was a synagogue. It had been Paul's mode of operation to go to major centers to establish a new work so that from there the word of God would spread out to areas around. Also, a synagogue gave him a place where he had access to a public forum and could present the Gospel in a question and answer style that was common in those days. Some may wonder why we pass by some cities today to reach another in the spread of the Gospel. The guidance of the Holy Spirit may vary from one time to another. There was never given a specific protocol to follow in the scripture

except for the plain statement, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel." In a general sense the disciples knew their work would begin in Jerusalem, then go to Judea and Samaria and ultimately to the "uttermost part of the earth."

When the servant is guided by the Master, he is under a control greater than his own agenda might be. To pass by some places to reach another under the guidance of the Holy Spirit simply means I must do what God has called me to do, where He wants me to go, and trust Him to meet other needs through other people. It has been said by many who have led by the Lord to specific places, "A need doesn't constitute a call." This knowledge will keep me from criticizing unnecessarily the efforts of other people who work in ways different from what I do. Paul went into the synagogue because he did not avoid the "children of Israel" who were part of his original call even though they had been the source of much of the opposition he faced. Even so, some Jews believed in spite of their prejudice. When something works well in the work of the Lord (like the use of a synagogue), use that method as often as possible until that method is shut down. We need to be aware of the fact that methods do have to change from time to time and place to place. When the time comes to make a change in methods, make sure the change is better than what you had before and be willing to use it as long as it in no way compromises the message of the Gospel and the biblical way of presenting it. The message never changes. It must always be scriptural. It must always be Christ-centered. It must always be clear and plain in its presentation as it relates to the audience, their issues in life and the problems they face.

The message Paul preached week after week was the same. Jesus is the Messiah. Jews didn't want the suffering Messiah. They wanted a conquering Messiah who would restore them to their place among the nations of the earth. Some believed, but because others were jealous, they rejected the message. Paul carefully explained the scriptures as he set them forth in an orderly fashion. He probably began in Genesis and went from scripture to scripture explaining as he went the types and shadows of the Messiah in the sacrifices and offerings, then going on to the Psalms and prophecies to point out through them, the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Jews who opposed didn't try to refute or reject the teaching of Paul. It was too well explained and presented for that. The resentment they had against the preachers of the Gospel was because of the response of the people to the message. This is being repeated today in places where God is working. The reality of changed lives cannot be refuted. The dignity, respect and commitment on the part of those who God saved is a testimony to the truth of the message preached. People respond in various ways to try to stop the furtherance of the Gospel. Open opposition at first usually gives way to innuendo, scorn, searching for inconsistencies and then comes indifference.

Opposition and conflict, finds its source in Satan. His agenda is to defeat the inroads of truth and righteousness into the areas of darkness and fleshly interests he promotes as the god of this world. He has in the past, and is still, hiding the Gospel by blinding the minds of them who believe not. Resistance against change is a natural human tendency when the minds of people are set on natural, sensual desires. Depraved animosity makes people want to try new sins that seem glamorous and appealing to the flesh. This then leads to hostility toward God and His people that defies explanation. What are we to do? How are we to respond to antagonism? Our responsibility is to keep at the work to which we are called. Paul's text was the Word of God, and he did not change it to some philosophical response to questions. His message was the Son of God. He determined not to anything but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The confidence he had was not in himself but in the power of God. The guide he followed from place to place and in each conversation or public message was the Spirit of God. That responsibility has not changed for us.

It is to be expected when a lot of people, including prominent women and God-fearing people who have finally found what they were looking for, to be met with hostility when they turn away from what left them empty. Thessalonica was an important city on a main highway where commerce and travel was important. In the middle of the normal life of that place came those who were "world upsetters." In this city at the head of the bay, cosmopolitan in population and religion, God began to work. We have in the history of the work at Thessalonica an example of how a scripturally gathered New Testament church began. The book of 1st Thessalonians gives important information as to why there was such triumph in the work of God there. Yet there were serious trials and travail that came along with it. Those men who were "bold in our God" conducted themselves in a most honorable way. They were not deceitful and were open in the way they spoke. God had put them in trust with the Gospel and they were determined not to let God down by using flattery or seeking personal glory. No one could accuse them of misconduct in anything they did. In Thessalonica plain preaching of the Gospel by honorable, righteous, consistent men led many to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no other way the work of the Lord should be done today. It is not right for us to avoid confrontational preaching in which the problem of sin is addressed by smoothing sin over with loud or soft music and entertainment. To present Christ as Savior in drama or sentimental words, makes Him out to be not much more than an accomplished actor. He is the Mighty God, who alone faced - and dealt with -

once for all the problem and consequences of sin by His violent death on the cross. No wonder there was turmoil and hostility in worldly Thessalonica.

Berea was a different kind of place. Smaller, quieter on an out of the way by-pass where people had time and the inclination to think and read. There were Jews there as well who were thoughtful and studious. When Paul spoke in their synagogue, they took down the scriptures for themselves to check out what he said. They did this continually day after day. In Berea many Jews believed and also some prominent Greek women and men. The "nobility" of the Bereans was they knew and believed the scriptures to be the true Word of God, and they were willing to act on the Word of God when they understood it. It is important to examine the things we hear preached to be certain they are true. When the word is given, treat it with respect and do not spurn it even if it cuts close. Search the scriptures diligently and seriously to be assured of the truth of God. When you come to a conclusion about a matter, be thankful and act on what is taught. The response in Thessalonica was hostility, but in contrast, the response in Berea was "a ready mind."

Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea to help the new believers who were under the stress of opposition from the jealous Jews of Thessalonica. Paul knew when to go into a place, and he knew when to leave. He was guided by the Spirit to discern which man or men would be most suited to leave to consolidate the work and prepare it to function on its own guided by the men of the place the Holy Spirit raised up. This practice is still the most effective way to enable a new assembly to be strengthened. Trusted men need to have the responsibility and ability to "teach others also."

Paul went with others to Athens which was probably the greatest center of learning at that time. There is a tendency on the part of those who rely on their intellectual acuity, to spurn faith as a legitimate way of living and as a basis for belief in God. So in Athens the attitude toward the Gospel was, for the most part, indifference and scorn. God knows the end from the beginning and in our service for Him, we must go where He leads us, take advantage of the opportunities before us, adapt as best we can to the people who live there and present the Gospel as relevantly as we can - and leave the results to God.

Acts 17:6. *"And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city crying, 'These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.'"*

AN UPSIDE-DOWN WORLD.

It started small with a band of men met together who had seen their risen Lord.
And with voices brave, and a vision clear - they went out by the Spirit inspired.
It moved apace as the grace of God and the impelling need of all men;
Pressed deep in their souls the fact of an urgent work that must be done by them.

From those men it spread as the Spirit of God moved others to join in the ranks.
As God blessed His Word and souls were saved, and families and cities gave thanks;
For God had begun a work in the hearts of men and women all around;
With the result that wherever the Gospel was preached; the world there turned upside
down.

Across the mid-east and on to Africa's shore and into parts of Europe they went.
With truth in their hands and a song in their heart, they traveled to where they were sent.
The Spirit of God guided their lives and their words; their mission was not theirs alone.
In some places many, and in other places none, accepted Christ and His work that atones.

As years and as centuries have unfolded their course, much has arisen to turn them aside.
But to those who have tasted and received what they heard, the Spirit in them does abide.
To each generation the challenge is given, "Go into the world and the Gospel preach;"
Many who hear it will think it is an upside-down world, when the barriers of the enemy are
breached.

The mouth of the blasphemers is cleaned up by God's grace; he speaks with respect the
first time.
The drunkard has tasted of the good things of God; he no longer turns back to his wine.
The home of the hard man has become a safe place, and his heart is softened by love.
His children now look at a father on earth who has been changed by the Father above.

In villages where folks live from the fish, the word "saved" was to them a new sound.
It is not just in church where we're supposed to be good, but new life is seen all around.
On the plains of the nation where people live off the land, the fruit of the Gospel is seen.
There is more than just money that occupies them, they live life for a Savior that's risen.

The cities are filled with activity and rush; as people go and come to their work.
But among all of these, are some who take time for the Savior of sinners to speak.
It's an upside-down world for those who give heed, and face up to the need of their soul.
Those who receive the word of grace, tell others they know and the Gospel a step further
will go.

I am privileged to be part of such a great work that God in the world is doing.
To be able to tell others and hear of souls that are saved, is part of what keeps us going.
To hear names of those we have prayed for and know, that God those people have saved;
Makes this upside-down world I live in that's different, the best possible world to have.

"I am grateful Father, that Thou hast given me the privilege to be put in trust with the Gospel. Give me the inner strength to be faithful to such a trust. Amen."

Acts 17:18-34

STIRRED IN SPIRIT

Two hundred miles from Berea, Paul came into Athens and a totally different philosophical environment. Instead of earnest seekers for truth, he found idolatry. Idols of many kinds were in Athens including one to a god they thought they might have missed. To that unknown god they even erected an altar just in case that god might be upset. It was important to Paul to have his fellow-workers with him as soon as possible, so the brethren who had come with him from Berea left him there and they returned to urge Silas and Timothy to go to Athens. In Athens Paul daily went to the market place to preach Jesus and the resurrection. Often in our service for the Lord, opportunities arise to pass on the Gospel to others in small group settings or one-on-one conversations. Not all Gospel work is done on public platforms. To be able to adapt to the situation in which we are found is an important part of our work. "Be instant in season, out of season."

The news of a new doctrine, or what the jaded Athenians would consider a new philosophy, reached those who had high standing in the city. The preaching of "Jesus and the resurrection," was unknown to them before Paul came. Their opinion of Paul's preaching was that he was like a bird picking up as seed here and another there. Cultured people are not usually violent, but they are sarcastic and seek to humiliate those who do not agree with them. Their objective is to hurt those who disagree with them by mockery, scorn and his happens often in universities today where some professors and other students look on new students as a fresh challenge on which to impose their opinions. Actually, the atheism and agnosticism many people profess to have, is a religion with a lot of influence on billions of people.

Evangelists need to daily seek someone to whom they can present the Gospel. Every believer represents the Lord and has opportunity at times to answer questions or make comments in the workplace that can lead to serious inquiry by those who are honestly seeking the Lord. Paul went to the places of business in the market place each day to get opportunities to speak of Jesus. The passion of his spirit was such that he was not satisfied to remain quiet. "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel." In spite of the religious prejudice and intellectual pride of the Athenians, Paul used his time well in that pagan and decadent city. The great temples to gods did not impress him nor interest him. He was indifferent to what impressed others when they saw buildings erected hundreds of years before to false gods, and when he stood where famous people of the past had stood. He knew who he was and why he was there. Paul's interest was in the people who were going to be saved or lost forever. His interest, his emotions, his service was focused on the never-dying souls of men and women who did not even know about the one True God.

Those Athenians were worshipping everything and consequently were worshipping nothing although they did not even know that. They knew what Paul was preaching before he was called to the council on Mar's Hill. He had been preaching Jesus and the resurrection for days in the city. Now he was called to defend his preaching by the Epicureans who didn't believe in the Creator because their whole purpose in life was to avoid pain and enjoy pleasure wherever they could find it. They didn't believe in life after death so there was really no accountability to anyone nor lasting consequences for their sin, so they chose to live for pleasure. The Stoics, like the Jewish Pharisees, lived disciplined lives believing there was lasting virtue in all they did because they saw gods in everything. They were pantheists who believed nature was deity. Those same philosophers are prevalent today and the results are the same now as then. People sit around discussing their beliefs and religious thoughts that have not basis except in their own minds. "You have your belief and I have mine," such people say. "It doesn't make any difference what you believe as long as you are consistent to your belief." Others will say, "Your truth is your truth for you, and my truth is for me. There is no absolute truth." This strange and thoughtless reasoning is an attempt to avoid any accountability to God in the future. People must be reminded that we will have to accept the consequences of what we believe whether right or wrong. But underlying all of the ideas people have is this fact - everyone who is going their own way knows there is something missing. Some will try to cover that with pleasure seeking. Others think they can deal with

that inward need by religion and others by denying there is a God at all and that the grave is the end - there is no hereafter.

It was among this kind of people Paul stood in the middle of Mars Hill and defended his preaching. He did not preach the Gospel to them, but started with the fundamentals of human experience with which they all were acquainted. He didn't in any way despise or talk down to those skeptics but addressed them right where they were, and as the kind of people they were. He was there to open their minds to the fact there was a real God who is a Person, not an idea or figment of man's imagination. Paul knew, as does every person that something is missing when one does not know God. The fact of there being only one True God would have been a very startling thought to those who were born and raised in an idolatrous society. Paul began with a very relevant illustration that was familiar to them all - an unknown god. To begin a message with something we see or know about that the audience can identify with, has the effect of getting the ear of people right at the first sentence. "Too religious," "unknown god," "you ignorantly worship" - were all phrases that had the tendency to grasp the attention of the hearers.

Then immediately Paul established a point of common ground - the God of creation. By giving a reasonable, thoughtful discourse about God being the Owner of all things and the Supreme Authority of the universe, he captured the interest of the philosophical thinkers among them, and the religious practitioners who had a variety of complicated ideas about who they were and why they were here. His explanation of the greatness of God in few words is a masterful example of preparation of one's mind and heart, being used by the Holy Spirit for a specific purpose. The great temples the Athenians had were trivial to the True God of whom Paul spoke. Anything formed is always lesser than the one that formed it. He told them of this Great God who is not only The Owner of all things, but is the Giver of "every good and perfect gift."

Following the initial explanation of the God of creation, Paul then teaches of God as the God of history who has established boundaries and who knows those who are truly seeking Him. When they heard of God being near us, the listeners would have known of the words the two poets Paul quoted. He gives life to us they had heard, and now Paul explained not only who God is, but what God is not. He points out God's personal knowledge of them and their sin. A change of mind is an absolute necessity before one can even begin to come to the knowledge of God. So "repentance toward God" must come before "faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Those who are skeptical about God's existence are not able to please God in any way. "He that cometh to God must believe that He is..." Before the message of forgiveness of sins will have any value, people must be convinced of the reality of God.

Before we point people to Christ as the Savior of sinners, people need to know they are sinners. People who are aware of sin against God have been clearly presented with who God is. We need to be sure those who hear the Gospel know it is the Gospel of God, of the grace of God, of the blessed God. Then we can tell people of what He has done for them; what He is doing now; that is near us and keeping us alive - and wants "all men everywhere to repent." Then we can do as Paul did - tell listeners of the God of the future. He has appointed a future day of judgment. The Judge will be the One who is, and always was, God, but as a man who was righteous in every way - He will judge the whole world. The resurrection of Christ gives unique authority that even the most noted philosopher can never have. "He (God) raised Him from among the dead." Even though Paul never mentioned the name of Jesus, the listeners knew he was speaking of Jesus and the resurrection - the topic of his preaching.

A lesson for us is that we cannot expect success every time we speak for God. Even further, to reject the message of the Gospel and to mock God has serious consequences. "Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." To reject God, is to be rejected by God. Even though a few believed on the Lord Jesus Christ in Athens, Paul knew it was time to leave. There is a time to go to a place, there is a time to faithfully preach the Word, and when what has been preached is rejected - it is time to leave.

Acts 17:19-20. *"And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, 'May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.'"*

STRANGE THINGS.

There is a difference in people - very few think alike
Some are easily moved - others won't change but they'll fight
When presenting the Gospel truth - of this we must be aware
We have to move to their mind-set - in order our message to share.

Some, like the Thessalonians - in business made quick decisions
It's not that they are light-weight - but are used to facts, not visions

Others like those from Berea have time on their hands, and they think
After full biblical consideration, they will act - but not very quick.

Athenians liked to argue and talk and with all other ideas compare
It takes a lot of time and patience before they will really hear
Some will believe and be saved - others will turn away and laugh
We cannot let anything hinder - they all need to know what we have.

A man's spirit is linked with God's Spirit when on Christ we believe
We know when a message is given, we leave results to God who can save
I am challenged to always be ready for whatever situation will arise
And be willing to leave the results to be seen when the Lord come in the sky.

“O all-knowing and all-seeing God, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I come to ask that what I will be preaching in the Gospel tonight will be a message from Thee that will suit the needs of the audience. I have been reading how the apostle Paul so suited his words to connect immediately with the audience that they knew right away what he was talking about. He even linked the unusual altar to Thee is a very powerful and personal way. May I have some wisdom from Thee to make this linkage with the audience whenever I speak. Amen.”

Acts 18:1-17

"I HAVE MUCH PEOPLE"

Paul's quiet departure from Athens has a certain finality to it that reveals the seriousness of rejecting the Gospel. To reject God's message of salvation through Jesus Christ, means they rejected the time of their visitation. When the door is closed to the faithful servant of the Lord another door is opened before him. Athens was a city noted for idolatry and philosophy. These two still go together to create a stifling indifference to the blessings of the Gospel. Corinth, a large nearby commercial center, was noted for smart business people who were worldly-wise and at the same time notably immoral in their pursuit for material gain and pleasure. These two also go together today to create a wealthy society in which the mad pursuit of satisfaction seems just beyond the last ungodly licentious experience. Corinthian conditions are now found in the large cities of this country, and affects those in other places who hear of the unrestrained activities that have been given legislative approval.

Where should a Christian go when they are led by God to go into such an immoral and unrestricted society? The believer who God has sent to such a place is wise to immediately seek out other believers for the purpose of personal fellowship and spiritual safety. In God's sovereign plan, Aquila and Priscilla were already in Corinth having been driven from Rome because of the Jewish unrest there. Pontus, the area of their original home, was in an area Paul had wanted to go to but was kept back from by the Holy Spirit. Now people from that place had come to him. God has His own way of working His will and it is up to us to follow divine guidance in spite of what we would do if left to ourselves. This couple, who were probably already Christians, and Paul, were able to labor together in this commercial city to support themselves and the work of the Lord they were doing. A friendship based on Christian fellowship was formed that remained and gave an increased ability to evangelize. Paul would preach and Aquila and Priscilla provided the lodging and a place for the new believers to meet together as an assembly. This couple was also able to teach the word in a way that supported the on-going work of the Gospel being preached by Paul and later, by Apollos.

In the city of Corinth there were many people who in spite of their active business life and pursuit of pleasure, were discontented and disillusioned by their lives, and they were probably disgusted with themselves because of the vain life-style they had lived. Into this city, and to those people, came the light of the Gospel shining brightly in the darkness. We know from the Corinthian letters the first impression of the Gospel came from the preacher himself. They saw a man who was not a huckster of the word of God for financial gain. Those brethren conducted themselves in a godly and respectful way. They worked hard and preached with power. To support one's self and family, and to finance the work we do by laboring at some daily job is not wrong for people today. It is true "the laborer is worthy of his hire," but there are times when it is more beneficial to the work we are called to do, to be in the workplace daily. There we come in contact with people at a different level of association. They know what kind of people we are by the quality of our work and commitment to our employer. Increasingly in the foreign countries of the world, those who are able to go there and work in the Gospel, need to have qualifications in some field of work to be able to enter and remain there.

Paul's message would have been the same in Corinth as he preached in the synagogues of other cities, and again the Jews rejected the Lord Jesus as the Christ. Paul finally made a definitive act by shaking off his clothes before them and clearly stating he was going to the Gentiles. Silas and Timothy had brought

financial support from the believers of Philippi, so Paul was then devotedly engaged entirely to preaching message of the Gospel daily. The word of God was pressing on him as he preached in the house of Justus and God blessed that word to the salvation of many Corinthians who heard, believed and were baptized. In preaching the Gospel, listeners are moved to the degree the speaker is convicted and convinced of the importance of his message. A listless, casual approach to the dynamite of the Gospel usually leaves people with little interest. If one is preaching with urgency from a warm, compassionate soul, people can sense that.

There are times in the work of the Lord when the battle against the darkness of this world and the evil around us is so great we feel ourselves being affected by it, and we know we need some special dealings with God. God knows when that time comes better than we do, and by His grace provides for us the assurance we need. We may become overanxious to press on to other places because we have done that before. But every place is unique. It is impossible for us to see all that is ahead. Like what happened to Paul, we find the Holy Spirit guides us to appropriate texts or illustrations in the scripture and we begin to realize our ways are not God's ways when we allow our will to dictate to us. How gracious it was of the Lord to speak to Paul one night. His teaching and preaching were heard by God and was being used by God. His way of life and attitude was such that God could use him effectively. Now the Lord came to affirm to His servant the Master's will.

"Be not afraid," indicates that Paul, like every servant, had a certain anxiety when he knows there is serious opposition in a community. Not knowing what is coming does create stress in one's soul, but when the assurance of well-being comes from the Lord, then we can sleep at night without fear and do what the Lord told Paul, "Keep on speaking." Don't stop doing what you are doing when the peace of God is ruling in your heart. Even more assuring to Paul would have been the words, "I am with thee." To have the Lord of the harvest, the Master, with us in our endeavor to reach others with the Gospel and in teaching the new believers, is the highest possible encouragement one could ever have. How blessed is the consciousness of the presence of the Lord! How reassuring. And yet the promises of the Lord kept on coming. "No man will hurt you." For one who was already bearing in his body the scars received from religious men when he was engaged in faithful service, this would have given him a sense of relief. Then the Lord let him in on the plans He had for Corinth - "I have much people in this city." Oh, what a wonderful incentive to daily go about the work of the Lord in an ungodly place! God has worked, is working, and is going to continue to save souls. This kind of assurance doesn't come in Gospel work the first or second week we are involved in an effort. Not only does the seed have to be planted, but it needs time to germinate and bring forth life. We also have to water the seed planted by others before us. Every servant of the Lord will experience the temptation to quit too soon. Paul was a year and a half laboring in one place before he had clearance from his Master to move on.

Probably around a year after Paul went to Corinth there was a time when Achaia became a separate province again, governed by Gallio the brother of Seneca. The word of the Lord had spread all the way from Thessalonica throughout those various provinces, so the Jews tried again to stop the spread of the Gospel. Gallio understood his role as the pro-counsel and refused to get involved with the obvious envy and spite of those Jews. He was known to be a warm-hearted man but he also had a keen understanding of what was obvious a religious ploy to stop the word of God from being preached. Often, we have encountered those who try to maintain their hold over people and keep their finances coming from laboring people by using the name of God or their religion as authority. Paul had taken nothing from the Corinthians. He had the record of lives changed for the better as a result of those months of laboring for the Lord. His reputation, his work and his message spoke for themselves. In response, the Greeks went after the Jews. There is very little accomplished for good or bad when there are skirmishes between citizens in a local area. But the result often is the work of God gets sidetracked and people turn to the conflict rather than to the need of their souls.

Paul wisely remained in Corinth and taught the saints many important doctrines. The Gospel including the resurrection was taught there. The Lord's Supper and how it is to be done was taught in Corinth. Building on the foundation of the apostle Paul, the work grew and gifts were developed. The work began with a great move of God among the people. By being among the saints, Paul knew who they were and what kind of people they were. That opened the way for his inspired writing of epistles that gives to us today some much-needed teaching for "those in every place who call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours."

Acts 18:1-3. *"After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; and found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers."*

AQUILA AND PRISCILLA.

They were always together, this man and his wife,
Yet each one was very distinct,
Found doing the same things in every place and time
It seems they alike did think -
Each one was different, and in many ways the same.
This seems so right for a man and his wife -
Not only for those two but my wife and me -
Our roles are different but we are a lot alike -
There are things a man does, his wife cannot do
And she sees things that I never would see.

They worked at the same job and that opened a door
To special service they had not done before.
They used what they had to help the servant of God,
And that service, led the way to much more.
It is not always the big things a couple may do
That counts in the great scheme of things.
To cook and/or sew and hospitality show,
Someday the Lord's "Well done" will bring.
Payday is coming, the time we don't know,
But to His work and each other we will cling.

They were willing to move when the way was made plain
For the sake of the Lord's work they were ready.
When they came to a new place, they were willing to stay,
And when Apollos needed guidance, they did it clearly.
Some things a man does, such as speaking in public,
His role is much different than his wife's.
She in turn has a ministry that is unique,
Other sisters need her help to guide their lives.
Both husband and wife when God's will they seek,
A great deal of satisfaction each will find.

Whether it is labor to meet needs or hospitality to be shown,
A married couple has a wider scope to fill.
To teach those new in faith, or help others know of grace,
There is a great work to do for God if couples will.
It was not just way back then, but today both where and when,
God's people and the world at large need the work of two -
Two who walk together in close harmony with each other,
In unique ways and work God's purposes of grace can show.
By God's grace my wife and I, combining strengths together,
Will have our hands full for Him where'er we go.

"Father in heaven, Linda and I are one in this work Thou hast called us to. At the moment she is busy meeting the needs of others as only she can do. Bless her efforts and give her the strength to do the work, and the satisfaction when she is done, that Thou art honored by all she has accomplished. May I never cease to encourage her as she does me. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 18:9b-11. *"Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city." And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them."*

TEACHING AND STRENGTHENING.

A man and his wife, walking with the Lord and loving God's people -
In the market place and the work place; with customers and fellow-workers -
When people come to do business or share the break-time with others who are weary -
In every situation of commercial life, we need to look for a time and way to -
Teach and strengthen God's people.

When one has private or spare moments for freedom of thought without distraction -
When traveling alone or sitting quietly in times and places of solitude -
When observing the faces of those around us with whom we have become familiar -
Each one of God's people has a different need and requires a different approach when we
Teach and strengthen God's people.

One may speak and with words of thoughtful expression and great intellect but be wrong;
Another may be right but the tone of voice, the inflection, the facial expressions, the
motions of the hands are wrong -
The use of scriptures may be used profusely and quotations be in correct order but the
context is wrong.
The average listener may not discern that something is not quite right here, so in love -
Teach and strengthen God's people.

Sometimes the interest shown and comments spoken or written may not be appreciated -
Sometimes the response is much less than one might have hoped for - at least presently -
Sometimes no one else will support the conviction you have to draw near to the saints -
Sometimes you will have to go it alone, and you may wonder if maybe you are not wise -
Teach and strengthen God's people.

Corinth wasn't a very good place to live for those who wanted to please God -
Ephesus wasn't a very good place to live if you wanted to avoid the pressure of false
religion -
Rome wasn't a very good place to live if you were a Christian who wanted to live -
The world today isn't any better, no matter where one might go, but we still must -
Teach and strengthen God's people.

The assemblies of God people today are getting smaller in some places -
The gatherings of God's people are getting smaller because of a busy world view -
The conferences of God's people are barely holding their own in size -
The Gospel efforts of God's people are getting shorter, and few attend; yet we must -
Teach and strengthen God's people.

“Heavenly Father: I pray today for the blessing of God upon His people. I know they are more precious to Thee than to me. I believe we have been able to teach and strengthen these people in the last couple of months, even when we were among them in Gospel work. Help me to encourage them in their on-going testimony. Help me to help them in the follow-up of new believers. Help us all together, as a group of the people of God to be blessed and be a blessing when we come to some of these one-day conferences. May we all be taught and strengthened as Thou dost work a work of grace among us. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Acts 18:18-28

ITINERANT WORK

When Paul left Corinth to go to Jerusalem as devout Jewish males did once a year if at all possible, he made a vow and cut off his hair when he was in Cenchrea. Vows and fasting were not an uncommon practice among Hebrews. The vow of the Nazarite was an especially stringent vow that was taken by some as evidence of their special commitment to God. Vows and fasting today, as then, are not wrong but neither are they necessary. When vows are made however, they are to be kept. To make vows and then abandon them is worse than never having made a vow at all.

The journey Paul, Priscilla and Aquila made from Cenchrea to Ephesus would not have taken too long. So when Paul went into the synagogue in Ephesus, there would still have been evidence of the Jewish vow he had taken. Perhaps that was one of the reasons those Jewish people wanted him to stay longer with them. His practice of "to the Jews became I as a Jew," was a way to identify himself with those to whom he was presenting the Gospel. Each place has unique characteristics. To the extent we are able, we need to find common ground with the citizens of that community and use that connection to present the truth of God. To remain aloof from people or to try and make them adapt to one's own way, leaves a preacher with a serious disconnect from the people. To try to make one raised in a rural lifestyle into a sophisticated city-dweller is a hopeless task. To try to make Asians who come to North America fit in to this culture that is so different from where they came from, will fail. The common ground of faith in Christ can eliminate barriers that would normally separate people. Even the new creation God makes of believers does not take away the influence of past generations. We must be patient and adapt as much as possible without compromising truth and scriptural principles.

The great temple of Diana, demonism, witchcraft and sorcery were linked to commerce in Ephesus. Religion and commercial enterprise apparently made a very successful team in ancient times. It still does. There are those today who point to their great religious structures that are extremely costly, as evidence of the success of their "ministry." Contrast that with what the Lord Jesus Christ said, and the apostles taught and practiced, and you will find no common ground with commercial religion. When Priscilla and Aquila remained at Ephesus after Paul left, they used what they had in the same way the Lord's people did twenty or more

years earlier. Their home was the center of their quiet testimony.

Paul's brief stop at Ephesus created no conflict, and because he had to go to Jerusalem, he did not press the work of the Gospel far enough publicly to produce anger from the Jews that would fall on those who remained behind. We do not have a record of all that went on in the life of that committed couple, but we have enough to know they were there for the Lord to lead and use to do what He wanted. We know the spiritual teaching Paul had passed on to them, they were ready to pass on to others. We know there were assemblies of God's people that met in their home. We know they were willing to help those who were unbelievers to understand the Gospel and come to faith in Christ. We know there was a functioning assembly from which multiple brethren could write a letter of commendation for Apollos. The Christian home is one of the greatest sources of strength for Gospel work. A husband and wife unified in their interest and testimony for the things of God is a couple God will use. The home of a Christian couple can be used as a place for teaching, for worship and for the spread of the Gospel. Aquila and Priscilla is an example of what can happen for God through a husband and wife. Many today are concerned about what happens between a husband and wife.

The journey of Paul from Ephesus to Caesarea would have taken quite a bit of time. When he got to Caesarea, he would have been very glad to see the assembly of believers there where Philip lived. It is a cause for rejoicing whenever we are able to meet with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ wherever they are and enjoy fellowship together. When Paul got to Jerusalem, whatever drove him to be there must have been accomplished rather quickly. We may not always understand the motives of a fellow-worker or what is behind his actions that seem out of place with what we would do. But some things we are best to leave alone and not speculate about lest we make unfair judgments and start false rumors. That kind of thing can wrongly color the labor others do or, for that matter, what we do ourselves. Some things that happen in life are between us and God only. Other matters are known only to those directly involved in that work or event. Unless there is permission given by those directly in the issue, leave it alone and do not discuss it or try to find out what is none of your business. Paul was the Lord's servant and to his own Master he stands or falls, the same as any of us. Paul went from Jerusalem to Antioch where the assembly he was accountable to would have been very glad to see him. The Lord's people have a right to know of the work we are involved in so they can participate with it in prayer or in any other way they can.

Back in Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila had heard an eloquent speaker from the university city of Alexandria. Apollos was well-learned probably from Philo whose teaching mixed Greek culture with Hebrew tradition and religion. This refined, knowledgeable man was a talented speaker who apparently attracted people to him personally as well as to what he had to say. Whether he had learned from John the Baptist himself or not (it is doubtful he was that old), he knew what John taught about the coming Messiah. His understanding of the Old Testament was accurate, but he knew nothing about the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Wherever the godly Christian couple heard Apollos speak is unknown, but they could discern a sincerity and reality in Apollos. While in the home of Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos wisely listened to the teaching from them and came to know personally the Lord Jesus Christ of who he was speaking about to others. It is possible for a person to be sincere in what they know and believe, but not be saved. To preach about Christ is far different than knowing Him. To know Jesus came to earth and all He did when He was here, is different than knowing He died for my sins. What a blessing it was to Apollos that this united Christian couple was there to explain the way of salvation to him. And what a blessing it was that he didn't think himself too learned to not listen to them. By the time Apollos was ready to go to Achaia and to the assembly at Corinth, he had learned enough from the brothers and sisters in Ephesus that they could gladly encourage him and send him off with their full support. He could articulately present the whole truth of God to those Corinthians now, and could enforce what he taught eloquently from the scriptures that both he and they knew.

Not every well-educated teacher who comes along is equipped by the Holy Spirit to teach God's people. But when there is evidence of new life in Christ and the fact that the Holy Spirit has gifted them to teach, then listen with an understanding mind and an open Bible. When a person like Apollos is humble enough in spirit to accept guidance from concerned, caring people like Aquila and Priscilla, that attitude shows, and people who hear them can sense the grace of God in them. Natural ability can create a problem because audiences of people are often moved by the eloquence and charisma of the speaker more than the content of his message. God gifts people in ways in which the combination of talent and gift makes one effective in the work of the Lord. It is right to use the gift and, to the best of our ability, be effective in our calling. But it is essential that all glory goes to the Giver of every gift. It is up to us to direct all praise to the Lord for anything that might be accomplished in a work. Even so, the fervency of Apollos had the effect of people following him in Corinth and carnal people became divided over men.

How grateful we should be when there are victories and advances in the work of the Lord in which He allows us to take part. There are times of disappointments too, but we should never let them produce a negative attitude toward the work to which God has called us.

There are times when God begins working in places
Where previously the door to the Gospel was closed.
There also comes often among us new faces
Of those who God in His great wisdom has chose
To do for others what we could not do
Because His glory He will not give to another.
And a fresh voice and approach He knew
Works best when He uses a different brother.

It is not a reason for discouragement
When someone comes to water what we have sown.
The Lord has full knowledge of those He sent
To bring a message with a different tone.
The great variety of people and of gift
Makes it possible to fill a greater need.
One who waters the truth is fit -
As is the pioneer who first planted the seed.

There is nothing in which we can glory -
Though God may allow us a share
In the work of declaring the story
Of the Savior who for each one does care.
Whether it be unfolding the Gospel -
Or strengthening those gathered to His name -
It is required in stewards we be found faithful
And the promises of God we can claim.

“Father, I thank Thee for the variety of gifts Thou hast distributed among Thy people to meet the needs of sinners and saints. How wonderful is Thy wisdom in not entrusting the need of a whole lot of people to one person. Thanks for the Holy Spirit who is working in Thy people to fulfill Thy work and bring glory to Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Acts 19:1-20

SO MIGHTILY GREW THE WORD OF THE LORD

The work of God grows and prospers when those who are engaged in it keep before them the vision of the world of people in the darkness of sin. The whole world needs to hear the Gospel. Those who are sent out by the Holy Spirit need to press on with the work to which they have been called. Paul was such a man. He knew what he was supposed to do and did it. He moved from place to place until God instructed him to stay in one place for a period of time. Ephesus was the city he stayed in longer than other places. During the three years he was in Ephesus with a group of brothers with him, not only did they see a good work done there, but also six other assemblies were established in the surrounding area.

While Paul was gone, Priscilla and Aquila quietly did the work they were called to do in the way God intended. Apollos also had come to understand, through them, the way of salvation more perfectly. He did not try to be anything other than what he was - a learner. When Paul came back to Ephesus, his apostolic discernment enabled him to see that some righteous-living disciples of John were not true Christians. The power of the word of God was seen in correction as those twelve or so men learned, that beyond repentance, there must be faith in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ personally. It is not enough to know the Messiah is coming. They must know Him personally to have everlasting life. These sincere men when they heard the Gospel, were saved by God's grace and testified to this in believer's baptism. Infant baptism is not scriptural no matter how many so-called Christian denominations practice it. It has been a great deception to millions of people. Baptism by immersion for salvation also has led people to believe the act is what saved them rather than the Savior Himself. To be identified with the Lord Jesus Christ is the reason for baptism by immersion. The death, burial and resurrection of Christ is testified to by believer's baptism, and newness of life is the evidence of the reality of professed faith. If there is no evidence of a new creation and a new walk with the Lord, even that baptism has no meaning and no reality. If such a person later comes to Christ and is truly born again, they must be baptized as a believer, even though they went through the form before.

There is evidence of new life when the Holy Spirit indwells a believer in Christ. The evidence in these twelve

men came about when Paul used his apostolic authority to testify of this fact. The fact that they spoke in tongues is not something to be dismissed out of hand as something not real, nor is it something that must be copied today. The Holy Spirit is sovereign and can manifest Himself as He chooses. We now have the whole written Word of God and can read about, and discern, evidence of the filling of the Spirit in a believer by reading the written words of Paul to these very people in his letter to the Ephesians.

The power of the Word in conversion was evident as Paul reasoned with and persuaded people to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and follow "The Way" in the local synagogue. His preaching of the kingdom of God would have been more inclusive than the future coming kingdom, or they would have gladly welcomed such a hopeful message. The preaching of the kingdom of God is not just "meat and drink," as it relates to the dos and don'ts of Judaism. It has to do with "righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." The Person of the Lord Jesus Christ is the coming King of the kingdom and people must know Him to be in that place of blessing. It has been said, "The same sun that melts the snow, hardens the clay," and that is easily seen when the Word of God is preached today. When first hearing the Gospel, some will say right away that is what is needed here. But when the truth of it begins to take root in the consciences of those same people, they turn against the message first, and then those who preach the clear Gospel. It happened to Paul, and it will happen to us.

In Ephesus Paul was able to find another place to preach daily the word of the Lord Jesus and "The Way." He was a remarkable man in so many ways. He worked daily at tent-making to support himself and others. He was daily preaching the Word of God in a way to defend and promote "the faith as it is in Christ Jesus." He shepherded the new converts in Ephesus "with tears" because he was so involved in their lives. He led a team fellow-workers by guiding and instructing Timotheus, Erastus, Gaius, Aristarchus, two brethren from Thessalonica, Titus, Tychicus and Trophimus. Through them and with them, six other assemblies were formed in that area. They are referred to as "the seven churches of Asia." He ministered with his words, with his heart, with his mind and with his own "hands."

When God works in miraculous ways, Satan will seek to oppose in whatever way possible. The very clothes that Paul wore when working at his task of tent-making were taken by people to those in bondage to the powers of darkness, and to those who were sick - and God healed them. This testimony of God was used to convince people of the power of the Word of God in conviction. Traveling deceivers were making a living by deception using the names of various gods and now were adding the name of the Lord Jesus to that diabolical list. That must never be. To use the name of the Lord Jesus has no power unless it is by the authority and power of the living Lord Jesus Christ Himself. That authority only comes from God - not even from Paul. Even those linked with a priesthood have no jurisdiction over the work of God. People use the name of Jesus today as a way to deceive and demean. They use His blessed name to make money for themselves by deceiving people with fake healings and unusual phenomena that does not come from God.

The reality of power and victory over the powers of darkness cannot be faked. There are serious consequences when people seek out the mysterious powers of Satan through occult practices, books, games and things like tarot cards, crystals, crystal balls and such like. A believer needs to remain as far removed from those things as possible. A trap was set by evil spirits in Ephesus to try to stop the work of God and deceive people. Satanic practices still go on today with the same objective - to stop the work of God. When the word of God was magnified, then hearers believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, they confessed Him publicly, they showed what they had been delivered from and who they were now. Those things that deceived them before were dealt with by not only abandoning the practices they had before, but making sure they were destroyed so no one else would be deceived by them.

Reality is seen in the attitude as well as the lives of new believers in Christ. They will not try to justify the sins of their past life. Whatever can be done to correct the damage caused by sin will be done. We begin with God where He saves us and go on for Him from there in our new life in Christ. We can correct what needs to be corrected. The rest of the consequences of sins committed before salvation, we must leave in God's hands trusting His word that "the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin."

The Word of God grew mightily in that part of Asia and especially we are reminded of Ephesus because there was a man who was sold out to his Lord in every part of his life. He used his hands to meet his own needs and the needs of others. He used his intellect and education to clearly teach others who were seekers for the truth of God. His emotions were used to warn God's people of the dangers of the world, the flesh and the devil - and of the blessings of being a child of God. He used the leadership skills he had to guide and encourage others to engage in the work of the Lord effectively. He used his writing skills directed by the Holy Spirit to minister to those in far-away Corinth and other places as well - even here - and now. He knew who he was, why he was here, and what he was supposed to be doing. It may be if we learn from this faithful

man, and man of faith, that the Word of God might again be mightily used where we are.

Were they super-men in those days or were they people just like us?
It seems like they were special, but maybe they had truly learned to trust
The Lord who called and led them by the Spirit now within.
They seemed to discern so well what was of God and what only of men.

Can it be that God could use me still to do some work for Him?
It may not be in some great way or a new work to begin.
But if it is possible in some small way His kingdom I promote.
Then I would be satisfied even if it is words that I once wrote.

Am I able to be given something so that I can help some others?
I really would like to lend assistance to some younger brothers.
Paul was able to help and guide other men in their labors.
Perhaps some of my work lies right here among my neighbors.

Would I really be willing to go afar and do some work unknown?
I think I would be ready if by God's Spirit I am shown
Something to do within the realm of my limited capacity -
And what a blessing if it would be fruitful for eternity.

What am I waiting for before some movements I will make?
I think I should finish here this work before new steps I take.
By God's grace and power when the time comes to make a change -
I want to go in fellowship with God, and in the power of Jesus' name.

"I learn from Paul's example Father, that not every place and work is to be done the same way. Please give Thy servant the patience needed to do what is needed here, and the wisdom to know when to go farther afield in the work to which I have been called. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 19:17. *"And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified."*

THE NAME

The name of the Lord Jesus is the only authority behind salvation from sin.
No other name in heaven or earth can in anyway conviction begin,
And bring spiritual light that leads to new life when one is born again.
Eternal life like a springing fountain is given by the power of His name. [V.5]

When the name of the Lord Jesus is misused by men; that is a grave mistake.
To speak His name inappropriately or ever in vain His name to take -
Denies the honor and respect that's due Him - against that Stone you'll break -
Dignity, respect and reverence must be given Him whenever we pray or speak. [V.13]

Wherever His name is preached and the message of Christ crucified -
The resurrection of the Lord is proclaimed and believers are justified.
Those who respond in faith rejoice, and His name is magnified -
The name of our Lord Jesus Christ is exalted and He is glorified. [V.17]

"O gracious Father, I come to Thee in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ knowing that the only acceptance I could have with Thee is through Him. For the great redemptive work of grace that is offered in His name - I give thanks. For the power that accompanies anything done in His name - I give thanks. For the results of being justified and Him being glorified - I give thanks. May I never be careless when I speak the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 19:21-41

MANY ADVERSARIES

In the service of the Lord the vision for the furtherance of the Gospel in new places never really goes away from one who God has called. However, neither does the care and concern for those God has reached and saved under the preaching of the Gospel, ever leave the heart of the servant. There is always a desire to know how they are doing. There is joy when we hear of their faith growing and spiritual maturity being evident. There is sorrow and tears in the night when we hear of people being disheartened and losing their commitment to the Word of God and His people, for the attraction of materialism and worldly comfort. Paul made a personal decision to go to Jerusalem. On the way, there were occasions when he was warned by

the Holy Spirit not to go, but his heart was still warm toward the children of Israel. So, he laid his plans, but also, he had before him the need of the saints in Corinth after he had written to them. He would not go there until he had received word as to how his epistle had been received. So, he waited in Ephesus while Timothy and Erastus went on his behalf.

It is not wrong for us to make plans in the work of the Lord. The overriding consideration is that we make them under the gracious guidance of the Holy Spirit. Dangers associated with making plans are that we usually have a personal preference. That has to be carefully examined to see whether motivation behind it is spiritual or personally appealing. Another serious consideration has to do with the actual reason for leaving an open and effective door that is before us for another legitimate goal that is of less importance. There is usually a "good," "better," and "best" in making plans in the labor to which we are called. When faced with alternatives it is incumbent upon us to not be too hasty, but to watch and pray. Watch for the circumstances that imply the time is here to act. Pray that we not go ahead of the leading of the Lord, or hold back from acting on divine guidance. The road before us isn't always open beyond the next step. Act on what we know is God's will, and trust Him for what is unseen and unknown.

To be able to delegate faithful men to do what we cannot do is a sign of trust and fellowship. Paul knew the men he sent to Macedonia and Achaia. Those proven men could be a great support for the work in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea and Corinth. When we know and trust our fellow-workers, we know they will do what is necessary to bring about the desired result. They may not do the work exactly as we would. They may not approach issues in the way we had anticipated, but when we know they are "like-minded" and proven people, we commit them to the Lord and pray His blessing upon them and their labors.

The work of God prospers when there is a clear, easily seen distinction between what is of God and what is of the world, the flesh and the devil. Victories are won for God when the enemies of the cross are defeated, not when their opposition is placated. A man totally committed to God and the commission given by the Lord to go and make disciples, will create a stir and adversaries will align themselves against that person and those he has won for the Lord. A person in fellowship with the Lord, and who is being used by the Lord, will soon be seeing lives changed by the Lord. People God saves will be different. They won't be deceived by religious trappings like those who made their living by serving Diana and making money off of religion. New life in a believer makes them turn from darkness to light. When people turn to God from idols there is no longer any common ground of fellowship with idolatry. The victories of the Word of God are able to be seen in a community when changed lives, changed interests, changed people start living for the Lord. The adversaries will hate that - but that is a good thing. It is proof of the power of God in the Gospel.

Opposition follows the same pattern today as it did in Ephesus. There is usually a conference of adversaries who meet together to plan an anti-God, anti-Christ agenda that will be directed at the life-changing Gospel. If what is preached is comforting and promotes comfortable living with a comfortable salary and a comfortable life-style, there will not be any opposition. But when the status quo is threatened and coming judgment for sin is preached, and salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ alone is plainly spoken of - people will unite against that in order to stop it from reaching their seared consciences.

The resulting chaos is not uncommon when reaching out to new places with the plain preaching of the Word of God. Most who rally together to oppose the Gospel have different goals themselves. Some want to preserve their financial support. Some want to maintain their religious dominance over the people. Others will join in the riot just because they are bored and are easily led to do silly things for no reason at all. The mob who rioted in Ephesus was incited by businessmen who profited by promoting false religion. The new believers would no longer have been buying their products after they came to know the One True God personally. Those who like to hide their covetousness and greed behind religion or what appears to be loyalty to their country, are pushed ahead by demonic power that flourishes under the guise of religion and patriotism. Confusion and loud noise, shouting and chanting do not accompany the respect and reverence the people of God have for their Lord. The counterfeits seem to be multiplying today use the same techniques as the world does to promote its programs. Dignity, respect, quiet confidence suitable to the honor to the honor we give to the Lord, does not come out of confusion.

Historically God's Word and work has prospered under opposition. The work of the Gospel is in peril when it becomes popular and accepted in a community. Subtlety can overcome the loud noise of opposition by producing a calm indifference to the preaching of the Gospel. When God's people are well accepted as just another religion in town, we are in danger of losing any effectiveness for God. Love for the Lord gradually fades when we accommodate to the ways of those around us. The contrast of righteousness is blurred when a work degenerates into a socially accepted group of people who do good for the benefit of the community as its aim. Separation from the world was obvious in the early church and it flourished when the Spirit of God

moved in power in spite of opposition. We need to be committed to the Word of God and the people of God, and trust the Lord to preserve the testimony of the assembly when it is under pressure to conform to what is acceptable to the ungodly.

We cannot avoid the pressure to be like all the people around.
It is inevitable there will be challenges wherever God's people are found.
Whether it comes openly or under subtlety and guile, we must to God be true.
People around are hearing and seeing, "The Gospel according to you."

We cannot ignore the fact that most people will not understand
The impact God's word has on us, and we obey it rather than man.
Our first and foremost obligation is to fulfill the work God intends.
Then we will be able with confidence the work of our Lord to defend.

We cannot excuse ourselves from the responsibility God does give.
It is up to us to inspire others to believe on Christ by the way we live.
And also, to be consistent when under pressure to conform -
To not fail our Lord and Master, even though we may be alone.

We cannot pretend we don't know the result of living by faith.
There will be many we know who will reject God's offer of grace.
It is up to us to live holy, and in faith to keep pressing ahead.
Then leave the results to God, who knows every word that was said.

We cannot know the results of the work God through us will do.
We dare not boast or take credit for blessings when we are through.
Give to God all the glory even though adversaries abound.
The end result will be plainer when we see our Savior crowned.

"There have been, and probably still are, adversaries, Father. I thank Thee that they cannot claim dominion over the work Thou art doing through Thy people. The indifference of this community is effectively hindering the work of the Gospel in the assembly here. Would it please Thee, Father, to bring an awakening of some kind here under the power of the Holy Spirit. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 20:2. *"And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece."*

MUCH EXHORTATION.

They passed this way before bringing the message of redeeming grace;
Always consistent in presenting the Gospel to those in every place.
Now the time had come to return - their steps to now retrace.
Those who believed need strengthening they'll no longer see his face.

Each place they had preached - they went back to exhorting all the saints,
Encouraging and explaining God's truth and what the Holy Spirit says.
The man who led the group of laborers knows his words do carry weight.
He is responsible to the Lord and them, to speak out and not hesitate.

Elders need his counsel - he is the father in the faith to them.
Younger believers too can gain increasing insight from him.
Sisters in Christ need to hear again, they are as important to God as the men.
The exhorter goes back to challenge and review the truth again.

All labor is important - we need to support and comfort the congregation.
The teacher passes on some truth needed for our edification;
A father in the faith has special influence in giving exhortation;
He was there at the beginning and was instrumental in their salvation.

"O God, I thank Thee for those who have been willing to be used to exhort the saints of God. Some are able to say what is needed in a very few words. Others are able to use gracious words seasoned with salt. May I have the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit always in my life when my turn comes to give - or receive - a word of exhortation. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 20:1-16

"IN JOURNEYINGS OFTEN"

In recounting a life of service for God, the Holy Spirit did not give us a diary of every place or every act of

faith in the life of the apostle Paul. Instead we have been given an over-view of his missionary journeys so we can learn what is needed to be effective in our lives for God. At the end of the account of the riot in Ephesus, we learn that Paul recognized the need of the disciples there to be comforted and assured. They were going to be there after he left. They would have to live from day to day as marked people among those who resented them. It is important for those who go from place to place preaching the Gospel and ministering to the saints of God, to consider how important their encouragement is for those who live in that place. The pressure to conform to what is going on around them never does go away. They need the strengthening that comes from those who brought them the Gospel as well as those who come to minister the Word of God.

Paul did that not only in Ephesus when he left there, but as he went back to those places where the Lord used him before. In Philippi he probably was comforted himself, as well as being a great encouragement to the assembly there. In Thessalonica, Berea and other places where the Lord's people were gathered, he made it a point to take time to teach and exhort the believers to be faithful to the Lord in spite of the perilous times they were living in. We may think the assemblies we move among are well-fed spiritually and ministered to by those God has gifted to meet the needs they have. But there are benefits that are unique when one comes with a concern and compassion for the well-being of the Lord's people. During those days Paul also wrote again to the Corinthians after he had received the news from Titus that his first letter had been well received and acted upon. True, there were some there who resented his authority, but the assembly for the most part had moved to do what was taught in the first letter he wrote. The lordship of Christ had been reaffirmed and the saints had not ignored his instructions as being from the Lord Himself.

After being comforted and assured by the response of the Corinthian believers. Paul went there and remained long enough to clarify his teaching and guide them into a more careful understanding of what it meant to be gathered unto the Lord Jesus Christ. The lasting impact of one meeting at an assembly is usually quite negligible. There is the fact that the saints know they are not forgotten, but as far as strengthening the work and the faith of the believers - that takes time. Public ministry in meetings of the assembly, needs to be reinforced by private conversations and by personal example that is only possible by being in a place for a longer period of time. Even in Gospel work, it takes quite awhile before the Christians themselves are actively involved in bringing people they know to hear the Word of God being preached.

When we make plans to do certain things, we must always remember, "If the Lord will, we will do this or that." The final authority as to where we should be or where we should go next, is up to God - not up to us. When Paul was wanting to go Syria by ship, he had Jerusalem before him. The plans of God were quite different because there was still unfinished work to do. There were instructions and lessons to be learned by us today that needed Paul to return back through Macedonia, go to Troas and Miletus. There were also seven men from various places who were with him who needed to learn from the teaching of the apostle. It was probably their responsibility to carry finances to support the poor in Jerusalem, but they would never forget what they learned while with Paul. They would have learned how to work with brethren who were different from themselves. Sopater of Berea would have been a student of the scriptures. He would have learned from Aristarchus and Secundus the importance of reaching out with the Gospel, and they would have learned from him the value of "rightly dividing the word of truth." The variety of nationalities in Gaius, Timotheus, Tychicus and Trophimus would have taught them how to adapt to others in order to work, travel and learn together under the influence and guidance of Paul. It is a good thing to live and work together that we may be more able to serve the Lord in difficult places and in difficult circumstances. These men were willing to be guided by the leadership of Paul. In that way they would be better equipped for a future day when they would need to take the responsibility of teaching and leading others. Paul made reference to this way of learning when at a later time he wrote Timothy and told him to pass on what he had learned to "faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." That practice needs to be continued today in order that we have leadership that not only knows the truth of God, but are able to effectively pass it on.

By the time Paul, now joined by Luke, got to Troas, those saints would have been anxious to see him. Those brothers who went ahead of time would have told them he was coming. Meeting with those believers who gathered in the Lord's name there, would have been very memorable as they had fellowship for a number of days until the first day of the week when they met together to show the Lord's death and to remember Him in the breaking of bread. It was important to the Lord that we do this. It was important to the apostle and it should be important to us. Another point to consider was the gathering also included the teaching of the word that was given by the apostle Paul. A casual approach to the scriptures in a brief talk was not acceptable at Troas. When the Spirit of God guides in the ministry of the word, there will be opportunity to give the message God intends to be heard. The incident of the dead young man who fell three stories being raised from the dead by the power of God through the apostle, would have left a lasting impression on the saints reminding them that, what they were a part of, had divine authority behind it. May we never

underestimate the importance of the assembly we are a part of and the work we have been called to do for the Lord. The visit to Troas wasn't long but would have been very important to the believers. It was important to God in that it is part of the written testimony of the early work of God left on the pages of scripture for our learning. Never let us be careless about what may not seem to us to be important. That may be the very thing that brings comfort to some of God's people.

For some reason Paul wanted to be by himself for the twenty mile walk to Assos. There are times when we should be alone to think and have private fellowship with the Lord. Not everyone will understand that need, but we do not owe everyone an explanation about those times of communion. Some things are just between us and the Lord. Often things are clarified to our own satisfaction and we can then go on confident that we are in the mind of the Lord about the way before us. In serving the Lord, it is to be expected we will have to travel and people may question us as to why we do not stay in one place longer. There are times when we know we must remain for a lengthy period of time, and on other occasions as much is accomplished in a short time as could be done over a long time. The overall knowledge of God's will, is what gives us direction. What happens from place to place is directed by circumstances the Holy Spirit brings, and also by common sense as to what is appropriate. Steps ordered by the Lord will lead us to places we may have never planned for - but are obviously right.

What is so important about these little places, why should we stop right here?
A simple explanation is enough, a company of God's people are near -
And it is only right when possible to take time to encourage them on the way.
It may not seem all that important to me, but possibly will make their day.

When God has directed us in times past to do a work for Him -
Those who He has saved by His grace, hope we will remember them.
Some conversation, some scriptures read, some prayer and sincere praise -
May be all that is needed to strengthen the saints, and spirits again to raise.

To follow up a work that began when the Gospel was first preached in a place -
Requires some personal commitment from me that can only be done face to face.
Really, what is our life of service about if the needs of the saints aren't met -
And more than that, when we are willing to go, we find more than what we give, we get.

The short way home may seem the best, but the long way may be much better.
To see and hear the voice of someone who cares is more meaningful than a written letter.
For one under the pressure of the world and its ways, or of health that is deteriorating -
To know someone thinks of them and is coming to visit, often is very invigorating.

Don't think time spent to strengthen God's people is time that is ever wasted.
To give of yourself and minister some way, is better than a gift that can be tasted.
The investment of gift may be measured in dollars and cents, but self is measured in love.
To go extra miles and spend extra days is like a visit from someone above.

"Father, please keep me from being so self-centered that I forget the isolated saints who would be glad to see a Christian's dog. Help me to see from the viewpoint of others, so that I can effectively minister to their needs. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 20:17-38

TO THE ELDERS

Some events that happened in our life-time are indelibly imprinted on our soul to the extent we can remember where we were, who else was there and how we were affected by it. Such an event would doubtless have left a lasting impression on the elder of the Ephesus assembly. On the thirty mile walk to Miletus they might have had mixed emotions as to why this long walk was necessary. On the way back they would have realized they had been supremely privileged to have been at Miletus and heard Paul speak to them with such passion and pathos. They would never forget that day. We may consider the inconvenience of traveling to a conference or making the effort to attend an assembly meeting, to be a waste of time that could be used in a better way. The summons to "gather My saints together unto Me," is never something to be taken lightly. "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together," has divine authority behind it and should be obeyed. No oversight meeting should be put off or ignored as if it is unimportant. God chooses His time and place to speak to us, and we are in danger of missing one of the most important meetings of our life if we are not there.

The nature of the meeting at Miletus was that Paul had some final words and an important charge to give to the elders of the Ephesus assembly. Those men had been given a great responsibility by the Holy Spirit and

needed to hear of the character of the ministry of an overseer as well as hearing of the example of the character of an overseer himself. We need to be reminded of what is expected of one who represents God's Word to the people and represents God Himself by his manner of life when living in a community. Paul was the ideal servant of God who was devoted to his calling and to the work of God day after day. From the very first day they knew him and for three years of faithful activity for the Lord in Ephesus, they could testify to his genuine humility and open and honest preaching. He was undaunted by the pressures laid upon him and undefeated by opposition against him. They knew of his tears of compassion and his victory over temptations by those who were enemies. In spite of all that happened to him and the pressures, he consistently preached the word of God and went to visit the homes of the Lord's people personally so he could know the people and what they needed to hear.

This example of leadership wouldn't be lost on those brethren, and it shouldn't be lost to us. To lead God's people effectively, we need to be consistent in our service for the Lord both publicly and privately. We cannot lead the saints if we are not at the meetings of the assembly. Some excuse themselves because of the work they do. When that happens, we have to decide what is most important: a well-paying job that interferes with assembly life, or the care and needs of God's people and a much lower standard of living. The true shepherd will choose to be with the people of God over money. One who leads, guards and guides God's people in the way he should, will know where the saints live and know the needs they are facing in their lives. Sometimes all that can be done for people is to pray and read the scriptures with them. Others times there may be opportunity to assist them in some other need in their lives. Tears and temptations are to be expected when we "bear one another's burdens."

The content of Paul's ministry was to preach "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." His Gospel message was not a complicated exegesis on some obscure point that didn't fit the people to whom he was speaking. Those who heard Paul speak knew they had to personally repent of their sin. They knew, and had to admit, they were wrong in their thoughts about God. They also knew from his preaching there was no other way of salvation apart from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. The Gospel preaching of any brother who speaks on behalf of an assembly must be consistent with what the scriptures teach and should be given in a way that represents the believers who live there. The same holds true of anything that is profitable to the growth and welfare of the believers in the assembly. The example of Paul's leadership is a template for sincere, honest, gracious spiritual elders of an assembly.

For some reason Paul felt compelled to go to Jerusalem to pass on the needed aid, but also to minister spiritual truths to the believers there. Others could have delivered the funds but he believed what he had to pass on in spiritual things was necessary. He knew there was going to be imprisonment and trouble because the Holy Spirit had told him that through his own prophetic knowledge and perhaps through other prophets. But life wasn't as important to him as the ministry he was given. It is far more important what we put into our life for God than what we get out of life. Paul knew what he was to do and he did it. He was to testify the Gospel of the grace of God. He had experienced it personally and now was to pass that on personally. The elders of Ephesus knew what they were raised up to do and now they were to diligently do the work of an overseer. When we know what God wants from us, we are responsible to Him to do it with our might. It is wrong for us to let any other consideration take precedence over the work God has given us. To live with a clear conscience toward God and men is essential to live with joy and finish our course with joy.

The charge Paul gave to the leaders of the assembly at Ephesus gives very clear guidance as to the importance of the work of the elders in any assembly. There needs to be those elders who guide and guard God's people. Plurality of elders preserves the saints from self-opinionated men who claim a position of preeminence over others. A balanced leadership is an effective leadership. When spiritual men take counsel and work together, the many needs of a gathered-out company of God's people can be met. One person cannot meet those needs by his own intellect and education, nor by his ability to labor effectively enough to accomplish the many things that have to be done.

The first responsibility of elders is first to take heed to themselves. Self-evaluation means that I carefully consider the state of my own soul and life to remove any hindrances to the guidance of the Spirit of God. By applying myself to all that can be for the benefit of my own spiritual well-being so as to aid my own family and the family of saints of which I am a part. God has called us to a work. Let us never ignore that call or down-play its importance in any way. I need to recognize the fact the Spirit of God has given me this responsibility. Others will recognize it as I do the work God knows is needed. One who takes heed to the flock, is a shepherd who knows the condition of the sheep and lambs. He feeds those who are healthy that they may mature and produce what can benefit the Master and His kingdom. Shepherds can sense when a member or more of the flock is less than they should be or when their spiritual health is deteriorating. Each person in an assembly is important to God and to the others in the same fellowship. "When one member

suffers, all suffer with it."

The value of the church of God is way beyond our ability to calculate. The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ indicates the assembly of God is of the same value to Him as His own life. This means the affairs of the church of God: the testimony, the prayers, the worship, the praise, the sacrifices, the people - are eternal in their impact and importance. Such an evaluation makes every spiritual shepherd who oversees such a flock, give due diligence to every aspect of the work to which he is called, and to the consequences that accompany such a work. There needs to be obvious spiritual maturity in view of the work given and the effect of decisions to be made. There needs to be a number of faithful men who can teach others the lessons they have learned from those who taught them. The transfer of leadership from one generation to another is not done by elections but by the obvious raising up of men who in the course of time are able and qualified to act for God and for the blessing of God's people.

The warning Paul gave to those brethren is relevant to us today. We must be on guard because there are those from outside the assembly who will seek a place and will have an agenda of their own that is not consistent with what the scriptures teach. In our day there has been an on-going effort to unite "Christian churches" into one great body so that we will be able to put a "united front" before the world. That unity, unfortunately, is not based on the word of God but on the desire for human power to influence political and public decisions to suit men's ideas. There are the wolves of cultic practices, of comparative religions, of the prosperity gospel, of the emerging church and a whole lot of other "isms" that are being promoted. But probably most disconcerting, are those who rise up from within the assembly itself. After some time among us and seemingly glad to be a part of the testimony that has been established for years, they start to sow the seeds of division. "What is wrong with that?" "Why don't we do this for a change?" "What difference does it make?" are a number of questions that should make shepherds realize there is a problem from within. By God's grace may all elders remain alert to the dangers from without and within.

Commendation to God and the word of His grace is the highest possible commendation a group of men could have. It states plainly who and what we serve and why we are given such a privileged responsibility. Paul again uses himself as an example of selfless giving of his time, his labor and his motivation for the blessing of God's people and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. He gave those men a rehearsal of his own life as an example for them to follow. He gave them a charge to keep and closed his discourse with a final word of review and challenge - and then they all knelt as Paul prayed and they cried. What a blessed benediction and what a display of genuine affection at this final parting. It is a powerful reminder that the work of God goes on even after we are gone. Our responsibility is to try to see there are those who are ready, able and willing to carry on the work of God in His way.

Acts 20:32. *"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."*

THE LORD'S PEOPLE.

Paul called the disciples in Ephesus unto him and embraced them before he left them. He loved and cared for the Lord's people in Ephesus. He went back over all the places he had been in Macedonia and exhorted them to continue in the ways of the Lord. He went over and over the things that they needed to know. He loved and cared for the Lord's people in Macedonia.

In Greece he remained for three months because of the interest he had in the saints. A group of men accompanied him as he went on to other parts. There was no question in the minds of those men or in the minds of those in Greece that he loved the Lord's people. After leaving those in Europe he came back to Asia Minor to meet with the Lord's people at Troas. The *composition* of that meeting was *disciples*. The *occupation* of the meeting was *His Word*. In that meeting there was the *manifestation* of *God's power*. The *result* of that meeting was *comforted saints*. He loved and cared for the Lord's people in Troas.

At the meeting with the elders of Ephesus at Miletus for a final farewell, Paul reminded them of:

1. The **character** of his ministry [18-27]: **Characterized** by humility of mind, by tears, by many temptations. **Consistently** he went about his work publicly and from house to house. The **Contents** were repentance and faith; the kingdom of God; the whole counsel of God.
2. The **charge** to the elders [28-31]: Take heed to yourselves; take care of the flock He purchased with the blood of His own (Son).
3. The **commendation** to God [32-38]: To the word of His grace that builds and sanctifies; gave a quote known word-wide, the substance of which is given in Lu.6:38; 11:9.

The nature of that the meeting was a leader giving a final, personal, affectionate, direct charge to those

taking the oversight of an assembly. He reminded them of the fact of the church being purchased with blood [v.28]. The provision of the church is God and the word of His grace [v.32]. The true administration of the church is the Holy Spirit and the overseers (bishops) [v.28]. The perils of the church are wolves without and men from within [v.24, 30]. There was no question in their minds: Paul loved and cared for the Lord's people.

May it always be so with me: The Lord's people are precious to God and I do love and want to care for them to the best of my ability and as long as I can.

“Father; Thy people are honorable and important to the work of Thy kingdom. Many are willing and do not know what to do or how to do it. Give me please, a sense of how best to meet the needs that arise among us. Today there will be opportunity to speak in a variety of meetings of the saints. Give understanding, power and grace to Thy servant - that all the people of the Lord will be blessed. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Acts 21:1-16

FINDING DISCIPLES

To those of us living in the 21st century, traveling great distances is not a difficulty. We can go from one part of the world to the opposite side in a day. When the apostle Paul and his traveling companions boarded a ship and traveled from place to place, every stop they made was a notable event. The fellowship of faithful saints who travel together can be a time of great and lasting blessing. Meaningful conversation, the study of the scriptures, earnest prayer together, are often highlights of a journey when saints are together for long periods of time. These times can either be a boring waste of time, or times of special fellowship that do us good for the rest of our lives. Our choices in those times determine the blessings that can be found there. Usually there are opportunities to meet and converse with people we have never met before. During those conversations we will be able to share testimonies of the grace of God to us. Unbelievers we meet may only have this time with us to hear a clear presentation of the Gospel. Other people we meet may turn out to be fellow believers and time together can be times of refreshment and strengthening in the faith.

When the ship Paul and his companions were on stopped at Tyre for a week, they made it a point to look for disciples there until they found them. This was not an accidental connection but a deliberate attempt by the travelers to find fellow believers. Years before some men had come from Tyre seeking Jesus where He was here. He made it a point to go to Tyre Himself, and a woman from that area was blessed because of her coming in confidence to Him. Whether Paul knew about those people or not, is not recorded. But the Holy Spirit knew, and guided the travelers to find those of "like precious faith." During that week together there would have been opportunity to be together at the Lord's Supper. There was opportunity to share the truths of God together and likely Paul gave a lot of teaching that would have been of lasting benefit to those disciples. They knew that Paul was going to run into trouble at Jerusalem and gave clear warning to him. That week was so significant that husbands, wives and children went with the travelers to the ship. What a prayer meeting that was when all those people knelt down on that sea shore and commended each other to God!

We will ever know the benefits that will arise from one week spent with Christians we never knew before. The scenery and the attractions of the city-life of Tyre was not what would be remembered by Paul, Luke and the other brothers who were there. The fellowship of the Lord's people and the joy and blessing that was brought to each would have been with them in the dark days ahead. The Lord's people in Tyre would be left with a strong affection for Paul and those men with him that would encourage them to pray and strengthen in their testimony in that worldly city. If we do not seek out the Lord's people when we travel, we are missing out on some of life's choicest experiences. Even when traveling to places where we don't speak the same language, there is a deep reciprocating fellowship and joy when we look into the faces of the Lord's dear people and see evidence of our Savior in words, facial expressions and sign-language that conveys our faith in Christ that we share. To watch the faces of God's people when they sing hymns of praise, to bow our heads in the fellowship of prayer, to hold in our hands the Bible, is a strong bond of the fellowship of grace we have all experienced.

The waving of hands at the parting, the embraces of appreciation, the smiles of affection and even the tears of emotional bonds are all evidences of the value of God's people finding each other and being nourished by the life in Christ we share in common. Even one day in Ptolemais with the believers would have left the impression on those isolated saints that they were a part of a large work God was doing in the world. Today there are believers in many small communities who feel isolated and sometimes are neglected. We should never consider our time more important than theirs, and we must make the effort to find them and encourage them, even if we only have one day to spend with them.

Caesarea was a major center of the Roman government in that area. It was also the place where Philip, the evangelist had settled with his family. He had been one of the deacons in the early days of the church, and had then gone with the Gospel message to the Samaritans. It was Philip who the Holy Spirit sent to Gaza to reach the searching Ethiopian with the message of Jesus as the Son of God. In Caesarea the Roman centurion, Cornelius, had been seeking for God and through Peter the door to the Gentiles was opened there. Now Philip, who probably was driven from Jerusalem by the persecution of Saul of Tarsus, now sits with Paul in his house! What great wonders the grace of God does! Twenty years before Philip was one of those Saul opposed and persecuted. Now these two brothers in Christ sit in the same house at the same table because both share the same faith in Christ. What a blessing it is when God works and His people come together in fellowship and hospitality.

Our homes are a tool of blessing to others when they are open to the Lord's people and as a place to use for the furtherance of the Gospel. The home life of Philip isn't discussed in the scriptures, but we can deduct that his four daughters learned from Philip and his wife, that there is a work they can do for the Lord. We know they wouldn't have been public spokespersons for the assembly, but these gifted women were able in their sphere of life to serve the Lord by teaching the Word of God. "Edification, exhortation and comfort" are not restricted to the public meetings of the assembly. No wonder Paul and his fellow-travelers remained in Caesarea many days. They were encouraged and by helping the brothers and sisters in Christ, helped themselves when they praised and worshiped with the believers there. Looking back over twenty years like Philip, can be a good thing for us. Into that setting came the prophecy of Agabus declaring by the Holy Spirit that Paul would be imprisoned and bound at Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit did not forbid him to go. He simply and plainly told Paul what was going to happen there.

It is easy to understand the feelings of Luke and the others who did not want Paul to go to Jerusalem. They knew what persecution and opposition was like in other places and now it was going to happen again. Sometimes guidance is given by the direct statements of God, and other times God guides by circumstances. Guidance by circumstances is still true guidance. Paul knew why he had come to Jerusalem for a long time, and now the time had come to go forward in spite of what others had to say. Those who had sought to dissuade him, now realized "The will of the Lord be done." They did not abandon him there. Even after learning what was going to happen, their commitment to the Lord's servant remained steadfast.

Those early disciples, Philip and Mnason, still had a work to do. They had a role to fill in the work of God, and in these cases, it was showing hospitality. Some go out to the battle, and some "stay by the stuff." Both are needed and God will make sure there are opportunities for us to serve Him, even as we get older. How blessed is the fellowship of God's people!

It may not seem like a big thing to have an open door.
Sometimes we may think there's no work for us anymore.
And then a knock comes on the door and one is standing there.
We realize then we are still serving God when what we have, we share.

A strange city and location looms before us on the horizon.
We wonder if there is someone there who shares our heavenly vision.
Some words of inquiry, and name and a home address -
And before the day is gone, we are a blessing and we are also blessed.

The world may seem like a big place, but to God it is just a stool.
In the cities and villages, he has given His people a tool.
The house they live in is an opportunity to provide a place of rest -
Not only for ourselves alone, but for some honored guest.

There still are in many places, people who are alone.
They wonder if they are forgotten, will anyone ever come
To give their spirits a lift as they live from day to day.
And then a stranger- brother comes and with them wants to stay.

What fellowship and delight, when we sit together and talk.
There is a brightening of life when together in the light we walk -
And find there is Another who also shares with us His joy -
The results are blessings to each one of us, and praise without alloy.

Don't be alone or stay alone, there are others near who need you
To come alongside in one way or another, their interest is really true.
Who knows, the visitor may be an angel, even though he's like a man.

You will find joy in God when you do for Him what you can.

"Father; Thy people are such choice folks! May I always have the privilege of associating with those in Thy family. Please keep me from being self-centered and going home with only some pictures of scenery. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 21:4, 16. *"And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem....There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge."*

FINDING DISCIPLES.

Not seen at once for outwardly they look the same as others.
Each one unlike all other folks - who would ever know they're brothers!
Until they talk and then you learn their interests are like your own;
Because they know Jesus as Lord, and speak of heaven as home.

The more you communicate with them, the more you find in common.
They speak of God as Father, and of fellowship, and of communion.
The words they use are biblical - their interests are on the kingdom.
They speak of saved and lost, and wonder how they can win some.

The songs they sing have meaning - not in the music but the words.
When they listen to Bible teaching - they are making sure of "Thus saith the Lord."
When they gather together there is reverence and a respect for holy things.
When a need is known they wonder what else they can do or bring.

Not all disciples are the same - some are more fervent than the rest.
But all have this in common - "In Christ alone they trust;
No works of man will do; salvation is in Christ alone;
Life is the time of preparation - soon we'll gather around God's throne."

Unusual though it may seem, the older the disciples get
The more committed they are, wanting to serve the Master yet.
An opened home and heart are characteristics that are seen -
Serving the Lord by serving the saints is a real joy to them.

It is not always dramatic living, in the service for the Lord.
Often it may be a simple thing or some kindly spoken word -
That is used by the Lord through a disciple to some of His people bless.
God, help me to be a true disciple and my Master's name confess.

"I thank Thee, O heavenly Father, for Thy people all over this world. What a blessing they are to the world in general and how important they are to each other. May we all be committed to our Master and never hide our identity from those around us. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 21:17-40

THIS IS THE MAN

It is entirely appropriate for one who labors in the Gospel to review before his brethren in the assembly, the work God is doing through his hands in distant places. Paul, the apostle, gave a very detailed account of his work among the Gentile nations to the elders of the assembly in Jerusalem. The other apostles either were gone to other places carrying out the commission they had received from the Lord, or they had died. Some historians have sought to identify various places where they went, such as Thomas to India. What we know from this written record is that there was a second generation of leadership that was quite different from the first leaders. They certainly rejoiced and praised God for what was being done in the foreign fields, and the wonderful deliverances Paul had experienced was a reason to recognize God was working through His faithful servant. But the original characteristics of the Jerusalem church was being undermined by Judaism. An assembly takes on the character of the leadership. Those who oversee the work, set the course of the teaching, the public testimony and the example that believers follow.

For some reason the elders of the Jerusalem assembly had turned to compromising the truth of the New Testament with Judaism. There had been those in the church at the beginning twenty years before, but now there were "thousands" who were zealous of the law. The law and its demands seem to have become more important to them than the Lord Jesus Christ who met the demands of the law and redeemed us from its

curse. To accommodate to prevailing opinions of the world of unbelievers around us weakens the testimony of an assembly to the condition in which there is no power in the preaching of the Gospel nor to the teaching to God's people. It doesn't take very long to lose any spiritual influence in a community when we back away from the principle of separation.

The compromise with Judaism did not make the Gospel any more attractive to the citizens of Jerusalem. It certainly did not stop the antagonism of those Jews from Asia who came to the city for the feast and knew that Paul was there. The anti-Christ and anti-gentile prejudice of the Judaizers was not turned aside at all by the advice of the brethren to Paul to compromise. When we start to take matters into our own hands without the guidance of God, then one wrong thing leads to another. The problem of false rumor will always be with us in the work of the Lord. Any person who does not tell all the truth about a matter, may not think his holding back will have any consequences. But another person picking up the narrative where he left off, will create a further compromise to what are the facts of a matter. Before long as a partial truth multiplies, a totally false report emerges that cannot be stopped.

Unfortunately, Paul's attempt to settle the problem of rumors failed. His submission to a Jewish vow apparently for the sake of the Gospel, failed on all accounts. The desire of the elders to avoid what was considered by them to be unnecessarily offensive to those who practiced Judaism, produced a full-fledged riot by the anti-Christian Jews and those they influenced. We all need to remember there is always going to be opposition to what is of God by the world, the flesh and the devil. Compromising the truth never establishes a principle of righteousness or peace. Compromise never accomplishes the final desired goal, although it may make things easier at the time. We do not have to antagonize people by an aggressive attitude towards the people and trying to force them to act in faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ. It is important though, that we do continue to "preach Christ" and tell people the Gospel clearly so they are without excuse.

The desire of the elders of the church at Jerusalem was apparently a peaceful coexistence with Judaism and those in the church of God. There were those in the church who wanted to use the law as a means of being assured they were pleasing God. There will always be those who are attracted to works as a proof of salvation. But that does not mean we have to accommodate ourselves to that which is wrong. It is fine to be patient with the unlearned, but when there are those who are not willing to listen to the Word of God and change from their unscriptural beliefs and practices, then we have to separate from them. When there are "unruly and vain talkers" among us, they will have to be silent. Paul was submissive to the elders it is true, but we are not to submit to what is wrong when unscriptural practices are imposed on us for the wrong reasons.

What they had hoped to avoid, happened anyway. God sometimes allows things like that rioting mob to put Paul out of the temple, because He has a larger purpose. The intention of the Jewish leaders was to kill Paul. The beating was stopped by the Gentile soldiers whom God had in place to carry out His intention. Paul was to take the Gospel to kings and leaders, so God did it His way - by placing Paul in the protective custody of the government. Even when we fail in our work for the Lord, and we know there are sad consequences that follow - we do not need to despair. God expects us to pick ourselves up and go forward again as the way opens up before us. We really don't know the full reason Paul insisted on going to Jerusalem. We don't know what motivated this brave, bold man to submit to Jewish vows. This man who had written the book of Galatians before, seemed to be acting inconsistently with what he believed and taught. But we do know that wonderful man loved the Lord to the extent he was willing to die for Him. So whatever the reasons for his actions, it was between him and the Lord.

There will be things we see and wonder about in the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ. And we may feel well justified in condemning their actions. But there are some things it is not right for us to meddle in nor about which to make accusations. I have to live before the Lord each day of life myself. I know I have failings and have failed in many things. So far be it far from me to pass my judgment on others when I don't know the whole story or the reasons behind their actions. The Master knows all that really matters. Who knows what seems to be a defeat, may turn out to be the first step of a great victory yet to be seen!

Why is the crowd, the restless masses rallying together against one man?
Is there some underlying reason, for them coming up with such a plan
As to kill one servant who has taken some unreasonable vow
To please them, and the whole city comes together united now
In fevered frenzy to eliminate one man - what can be gained?
The desperate anxiety they had was to inflict much pain -
And after that, to take the life innocent of charges laid on him -
The problem unfaced they refused to admit, was their own sin.

I may never know what reasons lie beyond the unfounded accusations.
It may be misunderstanding or simply lack of effective communication.
If there is something I should do, that the matter can be erased -
Then I need to act on that so my faults in the matter can be traced.
But if nothing is known to be wrong, and I cannot do a thing -
Then let me rest in peace, and to the throne of grace I'll bring
The matter to the One to whom every thought and intent is known -
And leave it there to gently die, or if necessary be shown.

Failure is not uncommon in the Christian life, because we're human.
But grace unlimited is there to meet the need and keep from ruin
That which is profitable in spite of damage that perhaps will result
From some unknown sin or when as a brother, I'm taken in a fault.
Lest I despair and consider all that has been done for God of no account,
May I be willing from my "high horse" to stop and then dismount
To humbled knees and pride and face to the ground, and mercy claim -
Then rise and go forward, forgiven and restored, to bless others in Jesus' name.

"I know Father, there are times when failures threaten to stop my enthusiasm for the work because of self-pity. Have mercy on Thy servant, and for Jesus' sake, empower me again to declare Thy righteousness and grace that others may be blessed. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

WHAT GOD HATH WROUGHT.

From the day of salvation through the rest of His life,
God had chosen this man to speak clearly for Him.
He knew in his heart that that although there would be strife,
God was working by grace in each place he had been.

They labored together, these faithful men of old;
As the Lord through them, spread the word of His truth.
There were times when their message was to the Jewish fold;
And in other times God called them from the Jews, to break path.

It is not easy for a man to be misunderstood,
Especially when he knows this is the way of God's leading.
When a city or town rejects, even a church of God
Condemns; more than the body, but the heart too, is bleeding.

Yet, with a call from God and joy in their soul,
The Lord of the harvest did through these men work.
The years of travel and the tough life took its toll,
As God through His servants delivered men from the dark.

The darkness of sin has so many in bonds;
We wonder if light can pierce even such gloom.
However, when God works in regions beyond;
The results for God's glory are souls delivered from doom.

Even religion with its' fanciful claims,
That calls to the world with an arrogant voice;
Cannot stand against grace spoken in Jesus' name;
As the spokesmen for God call for everyone's choice.

"Choose you this day," came from the ancient past;
To a generation of people, who God called to Himself.
When the leader of a people called the nation to task,
It was a call to a Person, not to self-worth or wealth.

God wrought mighty wonders down through the years;
When those He sent, spoke for Him in those places.
They were able to tell others of fruit the Gospel bears,
And rejoiced together of the blessing God's grace is.

God wrought great wonders in the souls of men,
In the past, when His work through their efforts did prosper.
Today God's the same, here He works mightily when

With confidence in God we present what the Gospel offers.
God has wrought great blessings when young souls are saved.
He has wrought great blessing on the older folks too.
His workers march on telling of God grace when he gave
Christ to the cross, that He might salvation endure.

“O wonder-working God: I am so thankful when people come to us and tell us God has saved them. A work of God in the heart of young children is a wonder to me. In their simplicity, they just believe what God says. When a person is older the barriers are higher, but I am thankful that the Spirit of God knows no bounds. Thanks for visiting these meetings with Thy salvation. To GOD BE ALL THE GLORY. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Acts 22:1-2. *“Men, brethren and fathers, hear ye my defense which I make now to you. (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith).”*

HOW TO GIVE A TESTIMONY.

Four reasons why people will listen to a witness:

- [1] The power of God was obvious. He could silence the noisy mob with his raised hand. He spoke without fear of man.
- [2] The way Paul spoke: he spoke in the listeners’ own language – they understood him easily. The message never changes but the tone of respect is adaptable. He was willing to adapt his testimony to the situation he was in. People sense when you speak with love and concern.
- [3] People recognize the ring of truth: telling the truth commands attention. Being confronted with the authority of Christ’s commands, makes people stop and think.
- [4] A farewell speech commands attention: there is urgency when one speaks for the last time. There is finality about each statement. There is conviction in the voice when one knows this is the last time to speak to some souls.

Five principles a speaker must use:

- [1] He must be able and willing to identify with the audience. Do not stand aloof. It is not always “you”, but “we” so that they will know you are one of them. Be willing to communicate your association with the audience.
- [2] Be conciliatory. Commend what is genuinely commendable. Give credit where credit is due. Calm an audience, by being calm yourself. Tone of voice and hand motions can set a conciliatory tone.
- [3] Use terms that communicate effectively: do not unnecessarily provoke your hearers. Some challenges are best unmade. Some words are best unsaid. Avoid phrases the audience does not know. Highlight your testimony in a frame of reference the listeners can identify with – “saw a light”; “heard a voice”. God has spoken. He was acting in obedience to God. It wasn’t his choice, it was God’s. God’s command was given him through the revelation of Christ. Its impact was unmistakable.
- [4] Make sure people actually hear and understand your words. Clearly project your voice; clearly present your thoughts in an orderly fashion.
- [5] Major on facts that keep your audience with you. Do not get side tracked into lengthy explanations that really don’t add to the witness being made.

Paul gained a hearing and established common ground with the audience and then gave his testimony. Sound reasoning is good, but it is also important to state what God has done in your own life. Paul shared how he had come to faith in Christ. We must faithfully and responsibly present the Gospel and leave the results to God. Not everyone will accept it.

When Paul used the word “Gentile” that brought out their anger and exposed the actual problem they had. They had heard the Gospel before no doubt, through Peter and others in the city who were faithful preachers. Paul put his finger right on the issue and they didn’t like it. We too, must ultimately expose the problem that keeps sinners from coming to Christ.

“Father in heaven: I know that being put in trust with the Gospel is a great responsibility. Help me to be always ready to speak a seasonable word whether to believers or unbelievers. When I give some form of personal testimony, may I always give Christ the preeminence in the conversation or address. Keep me from majoring on “self.” In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.”

Acts 22:1-30

AN EXAMPLE OF WITNESSING

In the lives of those who are saved by God's grace, we will get opportunities to testify as to what God has done for us and what it means to be a child of God. Paul's testimony before the unruly mob of the Jews in Jerusalem gives us a guide as to how we best can do this. There are at least four reasons people will listen when we speak to them about our faith in Christ. God Himself is involved and gives us words that suit the time, place and people who are there. We may not have opportunity to prepare some kind of order to follow, but the Holy Spirit gives us the understanding and appropriate words to say. Paul was not in front of that great antagonistic multitude to defend himself. He was defending his ministry and was defending the ways of God when He works in and through His servants.

Secondly, the way Paul spoke was important. He had spoken in the Greek language to the chief captain, and now speaks in Aramaic, the Hebrew dialect that was commonly used by the Jewish people. When people hear one speak like he is one of their own, they have a tendency to identify themselves with the one speaking. The message we have to tell people never changes, but the way we present it should suit those to whom we were speaking. It is only proper for the speaker to adapt to the situation he is in rather than to try to make them come under his own frame of reference. The speaker is the one trying to reach the listeners, so it is up to him to cross any barriers between them as best he can. People who hear one speak can quickly discern whether there is love and genuine concern, or whether there is insincerity and a patronizing attitude on the part of the speaker.

Thirdly, it is not hard for people to recognize the ring of truth from the tone of voice of one speaking. Facial expressions and body language tell the audience if you are really interested in them or not. When one is telling the truth there is a conviction that cannot be just practiced, but it comes from the urgency with which one is speaking. My convictions about my personal faith in Christ comes through when I confront people with the message of the Gospel and what it means to me. A very high percentage of communication is done without words. Haggai spoke about being "the Lord's message in the Lord's message," and that cannot be faked. It is a real principle of communication that what I speak to others, must have spoken to me first.

Another reason why people will listen to one speak, is if the speaker senses this may be the last time, or the only time, these people will hear the Gospel. A farewell speech commands attention. There is a sense of urgency, when one looks at people, he knows he will never see again. With all that he has in him, and all the Spirit of God gives him, he seeks to go beyond himself and where he stands, into the places and persons before him. When there is an urgency in the speakers, the hearers can sense that themselves and often feel that person is speaking personally to them. In a farewell address there is a finality to it that has a special ring of compassion. It is not only the words that are important, but the fact that these are the last words I will hear from him. Last words are spoken with thoughtfulness and conviction. We need to consider that each time we speak some are perhaps hearing the message from God for the last time.

As Paul spoke to that audience from the steps of that building, right from the first words he said he identified himself with that particular group of people. Not only the dialect with which he spoke connected them, but the fact that he was one of them as "men and brethren" and was speaking respectfully to the position of the "fathers" of the Jewish people. He was not taking a high position as a Roman-Jew and standing aloof from them, but communicated in the first sentence his association with them. His sincerity was real as he began the recounting of God's ways with him. He spoke of who he was and gave a brief account of his past. As a Jew living in a Roman city, he knew what it was like to have been looked down on. As a student of Gamaliel in Jerusalem, he knew what it was like to be looked up to. As a devout adherent of Judaism, he knew what it was like to be a persecutor of Christians of "The Way." There were those in the audience who could testify to that fact because he had been a well-known leader among them.

Another principle in giving his testimony that Paul used was his conciliatory attitude toward them. He commended what he could justly commend. He was calm and collected in his thoughts and delivery. He kept the audience calm by being calm himself. He also used terms that communicated effectively what he wanted to say. There was no reason to provoke them unnecessarily and he avoided using words and phrases they did not know. Christians have a phraseology they use that is unknown to most people. And some terminology doesn't resonate at all with people because they don't know what it means. Other things need to be high-lighted and spoken of in a frame of reference that people do know and can easily understand. The Jews would have easily understood phrases like, "saw a light," and "heard a voice." That went along with the historical context in which they communicated. Now Paul was getting to the point of his testimony. It is right to briefly state what I was before God saved me. Then I need to come to the place where I tell plainly how God saved me.

Paul became very precise and clear as to what happened, where it happened and how it happened when God saved him. God had stopped him on the road to Damascus about noon. God had chosen to speak to

him. He was acting in obedience to God when he was saved. It was God's choice to reach him. God's command to him came through the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must be sure when witnessing that people actually hear and understand our words. Major on the facts of the message that keeps the interest of the audience. Paul used the actual words that were spoken. When verses of scripture bring light to our soul, quote them carefully and distinctly.

When Paul told of Ananias who lived in Damascus, he pointed out the fact that he was "a devout man according to the law." That would have been of real interest to the audience as now Paul was affirming the fact of his own testimony by bringing to their attention one who was of good report by the Jews who lived in Damascus. The testimony of others to what God has done for me adds a lot of weight to my words of testimony. It is important that what Ananias knew, supported what Paul did. He would "know His will," so he had behind him the authority of Christ. He would "see the Just One," so he had apostolic authority. And he would "hear the voice of His mouth," so what Paul said was directly taught to him by the Lord Jesus.

In the conclusion of his testimony, Paul brought it right to the present time when his loyalty to God was proven right in Jerusalem in a previous journey to the city when he had a personal experience of God's guidance in the temple. At that time God had told him to leave Jerusalem quickly. As he told of this experience he spoke of Stephen's martyrdom. Paul was not trying to avoid martyrdom but martyrdom has no value when it is avoidable. When Paul testified that God had instructed him to go to the Gentiles, the listeners prejudice overcame their knowledge of the word of God and the riot began again. Paul used what authority was at his disposal as a free-born Roman citizen to avoid unnecessary abuse. He was not out of the mind of God by claiming what was his right.

The compromise of the leaders of Jerusalem assembly blurred the distinction between Judaism and Christianity. Separation is necessary even when it brings persecution, because with it is power and influence with God and men when the difference between right and wrong can be easily seen. When a line has to be drawn, there is a way to do it with courtesy and grace that is very distinct from the anger and resentment that those in opposition to God's will displays. We need to remember that toleration of evil and accommodation to evil, is treachery. That kind of peace paralyzes the people of God and stops the promotion of the work of God. Communion and fellowship by compromise destroys any influence for God we might have. When there is consecration to Christ because of biblical convictions we can trust Him to use us to bring glory to God in whatever circumstances in which we are found.

When we are in the spotlight of men, we need to be conscious of the presence of God.
It is in times like that we are tested, and need to be acquainted with His word.
Those who listen askance will be seeking to find some challengeable flaws.
It is up to us by the Spirit within, to carefully and clearly define our cause.

What I know and have learned by experience cannot be discounted nor denied.
When speaking for God in the public, inconsistencies I cannot hide.
So, speak the truth with grace, and tell in plain words what God did for you.
The Holy Spirit at such times can guide us even though our words may be few.

Tell what you know first-hand, make an effort the barriers to cross.
Make people to understand through your life what matters to you the most.
Conviction and compassion have ways of coming across to hearers without words.
The tone of voice and attitude shows whether the words are yours or the Lord's.

The impact of a testimony given may never been known at the time.
The testimony you give is uniquely yours, and mine is uniquely mine.
Don't copy the story of another, but Paul's story is a template to use.
Tell briefly what happened at the first, and then show how God did you choose.

Changes that follow conversion are important points to pass along.
That way people know why you are different, and why you have a new song.
The new course in life you now follow, is explained by what you may say.
By your testimony for Christ they can learn why you now live a different way.

"I thank Thee, Father, for giving these written testimonies in Thy word so we can learn how to pass on to others the reason of the hope that is in us. I know what I do is important as long as it is consistent with what I say. Help me to be easily understood when I speak and help me to honor Thee in words and deeds. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 22:1. *"Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defense which I make now to you."*

MY DEFENSE.

The power of God was evident - the words were all appropriate
Believable words of testimony, none of which can be denied.
Things that one has experienced have a credibility - sensible, believable,
Not necessarily liked by listeners - but power was unmistakably there.

The way to speak - significant words - language that is easily understood
The tone of voice may change from sympathetic to forceful - but real
Adaptable to the time and place - meeting the needs of the situation
Listeners can detect and feel through the timbre of voice - love and concern.

Truth has a special ring to it that cannot be easily ignored
The telling of truth commands attention - it sounds right
Confrontation with the commands of Christ demand a choice
Truth told and truth lived make listeners consider themselves.

Urgency draws the audience to identify with the defendant
Finality spoken with calmness and quiet passion moves the emotion
Conviction linked with affection to the listeners, draws them closer
Conciliatory communication that is easy to grasp, reaches the mind.

Factual statements keep the audience listening to the defense
Repetition is needed to make sure the words are heard and understood
Authority is its own greatest defense, especially when given under Higher Authority
God has spoken - it is essential to obedience to defend the truth - no matter the cost.

“In a few hours Father God, I am going to speak to a group of people about things that are extremely important. Some things they will not like. Others they will assent to. Still others they will appreciate. I ask Thee here to give to this feeble servant an open mouth filled with Thy truth and spoken in a way that it will bring results of changes in live and faith. I ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Acts 23:1. *“And Paul earnestly beholding the council, said, ‘Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.’”*

IN ALL GOOD CONSCIENCE.

There is a witness in men that cannot be denied; its presence is continually there.
It is the conscience placed there by God in His plan, to keep men of God's presence aware.
When the hand or the mouth or even the thoughts, step out of line - the conscience steps
in.

What may first have been thought as just a good time; the conscience may say it is sin.

Conscience approves or condemns, as God intended it to; that we His will do obey.
The whisper in the soul is the voice God placed there; so, we will watch what do and we say.
When the conscience is pure, we can live quite content; when it is bad, we will be ill at ease.
The accuser so powerful when it makes itself known, will be at rest when it is God that we
please.

To accuse us of sin is one of the means; the Spirit uses conscience to bring the proud
down.

No accuser of men is as powerful a force as the conscience to make truth be known.
The guilt that it brings can make a sinner repent, and down on his knees there to fall.
The work of God's grace reveals it is not a foe, but of all the senses the greatest friend of
all.

For conscience we submit to the authority of others, who rule to bring blessings to pass.
There will be times when for the sake of our conscience we suffer, pain's desperate and
awful blast.

Not an enemy but a friend, one of the best of all is the conscience that humbles my pride.
A conscience that's seared, is a conscience defiled; such an enemy will be a false guide.

I am not at liberty to ignore those around; I am never their conscience to offend.
It would be hurtful of me to make out a joke that would hinder that person's best friend;
For the conscience they have may be more tender than mine; what would hurt them would
never hurt me.

So, the conscience God gave me, is best friend to us both, its testimony makes us both to see.

The voice of the soul is this conscience of mine; it speaks loudly even when I am deaf.
It keeps my life straight, my pilot it is, so that of this time here on earth I will not wreck.
To live in good conscience all of what's left of this life, is a goal that I continually seek.
To look in the eye all men and the Savior as well - will happen, if good conscience I keep.

“Father, it must be a great delight to Thee to watch a man like Paul who could live his life in good conscience. There are times when mine blows the whistle on me and I am thankful for it. Yet it happens too often. Missed opportunities, wasted time, self-centered living bothers me. Give me a better spiritual hearing that I may act before the fact rather than after. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Acts 23

THE LORD STOOD BY HIM

There have always been times in the lives and labors of those who serve God in the work of the Gospel, that challenges come against them that cannot be avoided. It is a good practice for those who are involved in this work to review from time to time, the ways of God with us right from our call at the beginning, to the events that led to present circumstances. Paul was able to say he had "lived in all good conscience before God until this day." That assurance enabled him to look straight at those men who formed the Sanhedrin and not feel guilty in any way. The tumultuous day before must have left him with a sense of uncertainty, but by reviewing, perhaps during the night, his life of service for God, he could have the confidence of a clear conscience.

As to his response to Ananias the high priest, he may have been trying to make the point that such an action on the priest's part was inconsistent with the role of the priest. Paul did not acknowledge him as God's high priest but simply as the high priest of a passing religious order. We should always give due consideration to one who represents the people as a legitimate representative. Not all law enforcement officers, judges or administrators are honorable nor honest. Yet because of the position they hold, we owe them respect. When we represent Christ to those around us, that should be able to be seen.

The divided council is typical of most representative groups. They are easily divided over opinions they hold rather than the laws or standards they are supposed to defend. Some things are best left to God to deal with, even though we may have a scheme that will help us while it hurts them. Paul had wanted to go to Jerusalem and he got there. He wanted to see the brethren and he saw them. It was doubtless his purpose to speak to his national brethren the Jews, and he did that too. But none of it seemed to be working out very well. It is possible that our plans are able to be carried out, and yet the results be very different from what we had anticipated. The uproar of those dignified council members and the contention among them must have startled Paul when he realized how vigorous the dissension among them was. The pulling for and against Paul was of such force he was in danger of dying right there. If left to ourselves we can create unnecessary problems, but God has His way of dealing with people and events. God can make "even the wrath of man to praise Him."

By the time nightfall came Paul must have been very discouraged. In his appearance before the council, his respectful approach to them was rejected and his sincerity was insulted. The righteousness of his good conscience was rejected and the testimony he had previously given had fallen on deaf ears. He may have been lying awake in the night dejected and wondering what was really going to happen to him next. In times of our extremity we are usually more open to the voice of God than when things are going as we had planned. One has said, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." When "The Lord stood by him" and spoke to His servant, Paul was certainly ready to hear His words. God stepped into the situation rather than taking Paul out of it. It may be in the purposes of God to leave us in difficult circumstances so that He can bring things about in His way, not ours. God is always in control and His will must be done in the way that is most suitable to Him. God gave His servant Paul, the assurance that He was with him. "The Lord stood by him," but He did not arrange an escape as He had with Peter years earlier.

When God visits us in our times of stress, everything is changed. The Lord raised his dejected spirit with the personal words, "Be of good cheer, Paul." Paul knew the Lord was cognizant of who he was and where he was. The Lord addressed the fact that He had been listening to what His servant has been saying before the multitude and the council, "Thou hast testified of Me." Then as the Lord stood by him, He was told by the highest authority, "So must thou bear witness also at Rome." In gracious sympathy the Lord dealt with every issue that had come upon Paul.

It is no small matter when difficulties arise in our service for God. He knows every word spoken against His servants, and He knows every word and attitude we have towards those in opposition to us. We must be careful not only as to what we say, but how we say it. The words we preach publicly and the words spoken in private are all heard by the Master we serve and represent. What caution we must use when we open our lips in the furtherance and defense of the Gospel. To promote our motivation in the work of the Lord to which we have been called, we need to be aware of the fact that God already has a plan laid out for us. Our responsibility is to be willing and ready to obey Him, whenever He reveals His will to us as we go step by step.

We may never know the conspiracies that are planned against us, but nothing is hidden from our Lord. If He chooses to reveal them to us so that we can take some defensive action, then be thankful that He has made a way to escape. I am sure that there are many attempts to thwart the work we seek to do for the Lord that we may never know about - but God does. Therefore, we rest in Him in whose hands our "times" are. The Lord used an unbeliever to deliver Paul and to start him on his journey to Rome. The things that happen to us may forever be hidden from us as to the purpose or even the people used, but we can rejoice in the fact that "He knowest the way that I take," and nothing men, principalities and powers can do will stop the divine will from being accomplished by God's obedient servants.

In the hours of darkness, some of our fears are faced.
The events of the day before in our minds we carefully trace.
To see if what we did was right or if there were some bad mistakes -
And if there were, we need to think if there is restitution we must make.

In the hours of darkness, we sing some of our best songs -
"Power in the Blood," or "Amazing Grace," maybe "Farther Along."
Because in those silent songs from our heart, we have nothing to hide.
And our fellowship with God is sweet and "Let me with Thee abide."

In the hours of darkness, the Lord drew near to stand
Beside His discouraged servant and in the work, strengthen his hand.
He learned the Lord knew his emotions were stretched to the breaking point.
And with the words He spoke to him, with oil of gladness did anoint.

In the hours of darkness, we often pray and renew again our resolve
To be faithful and true to God's leading even when there are problems we can't solve.
Just to know God knows, and be reminded again that all is under His control -
Brings rest to a weary body, and grace and contentment to the soul.

"Father, some of the things we have had to deal with recently, and the fact that the results are very long-lasting, is of great concern. And yet, in Thee do I put my trust, knowing every issue and outcome is known to Thee. I will rest in Thee and praise Thee for the outcome, even though I may never know it. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 23:7. *"And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees: and the multitude was divided."*

DISSENSION.

A thing may start small - only a matter of words and opinions that cause men to differ.
The real problem comes when positions are taken and the dissension goes on forever.
When doctrines are different, fundamental truth challenged, we cannot go along with that
Generally, though, it is the little picky things that lead further to a full-blown spat.

Differences may be hidden until a common cause has risen that brings differences in to
full view;

"You said this," or "You did that," until finally: "I want nothing to do with you!"
How sad it is when there's dissension among brethren whose strength lies in unity.
Dissension brings division right on its tracks stopping the good God intended to be.

In Paul's case it's true that dissension he knew would produce what he wanted in the end.
Because of that dissension, the result we know, was a part of God's greater and ultimate
plan.

In this case the Spirit of God arranged a conviction to be stated that made all stop and
think.

A few words of truth spoken out clear and plain, pushed latent dissension over the brink.

There are lessons to be learned when we read passages like this, a small thing soon gets very big.
Deal with dissension quickly before it gets a hold of you, or you'll fall into the pit you had to dig.
Think before you speak, a few words can make the difference between a peaceful solution or serious dissension.
Remember, if you wait or ignore underlying dissension you soon will be responsible for division.

Learn to think before you talk; consider before you act - what will the outcome of this decision be.
Will it lead to compromise? What are the issues, wherein lies a serious result that up to now I cannot see?

When dissension rises its' head, make sure that what is said will not hinder or stop important work.
Dissension left unchecked can fester and maybe grow to the place where it leaves a lasting hurt.

“Gracious God, may it please Thee to make plain to me before any dissension arises, any way I can alleviate the situation or bring it to a stop. If I am causing it - let me know so I can stop whatever I am doing and change. If others are involved and I can help solve the issue, give me the wisdom to do it. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Acts 24

WAITING TIMES

Paul would have known when he left Jerusalem under the safety of a large company of soldiers, that he was starting the journey to Rome of which the Lord had told him. There is a certain anticipation we have when a new venture is begun or a journey started, that we hope will be successful in its purpose. In the case of Paul at Caesarea the antagonism of the Jewish leaders and in particular, Ananias the old high priest, was such that they were in haste to get Paul done away with once and for all. The oratory of Tertullus, the lawyer, was supposed to have moved the governor, Felix, to act quickly in the way, and with the result they wanted. A fact of life those who are involved in reaching out with the Gospel have to face is that there will be a deep-seated opposition of one kind or another. Satan is not going to give up territory or people without a real fight against truth and righteousness. He is a liar and a deceiver, and knows there are liars and deceivers among men he can quickly get to do his wishes. Such men were Ananias, Tertullus and those with them.

The accusations made against Paul followed the flowery flattering introduction Tertullus made to try to appeal to Felix. Even profligate sinners who live licentious, ungodly lives for pleasure in a vain search for satisfaction, know when they are being flattered in order to manipulate them to accommodate to the wishes of accusers. The personal charge against Paul was that he was a troublemaker. When exaggerations and unfounded charges are made based only on hearsay, sometimes the best thing to do is to remain silent and not dignify a foolish statement with a reply. The accusation of Paul being a disturber of the peace all over the world, was an attempt to make a national charge which would be a worry to the Roman government. The charge that he was leading the sect of the Nazarenes was to have him condemned religiously as well as when falsely accused of bringing a Gentile into the temple.

When accusations are made against us, sometimes they seem so foolish that they are ignored. Other times an answer is required and at those times the Holy Spirit will guide us as to what to say. The right approach at such times is a calm deliberate account of the facts which are obviously based on common sense and the truth. It is always right to tell the truth so that all challenges can be silenced by the simple statements of witnesses who may have a bearing on the case. When Paul made his defense, he answered with courtesy to the governor but without flattery. He knew a Roman governor would know what was going on in his area of jurisdiction. The one week between the time he went from Caesarea and when he was brought back to Caesarea as a prisoner did not allow time for all he was charged with to take place. Now five days later these men came with their charges. All the charges they made were impossible to have happened in twelve days. Paul pointed out the common historical features between Judaism and Christianity. "The Way" apparently had become an identifying title that was attached to the believers in Christ who lived in that area, much like "Christians" was the name given to believers in Antioch. The resurrection of the dead was the source of the contention that created the riot in the temple. That same teaching was taught by those who believed the law and the prophets. The charge that he profaned the temple was made by people who were not even there.

To review the teaching that people oppose when we are charged with disturbing the peace, gives us a good opportunity to present the Gospel in its clearness and to apply its truth to those who hear the accusations. Most opposition we have today has either financial considerations behind it or people who are afraid of losing power and influence over people they think they control. To be able to sum up the opposition we face in one sentence, is the best way to deal with charges laid against the work of the Lord we do. That principle holds true in almost every confrontational situation. To sum up the problem in one sentence usually provides the answer to the matter.

Paul's defense to the charges laid against him was made with courtesy and without flattery. He easily covered the accusations as they related to religion by briefly explaining the history of the Jews, and what they had in common that could not be refuted. The result was that Felix who knew what "The Way" meant, granted Paul a clemency with a certain amount of liberty to associate with those believers of the Caesarean assembly. But waiting takes its toll on people no matter who they are. Lysias never did come to Caesarea. Felix was an ungodly man without morals or scruples to guide him. He probably wanted some diversion, so in getting Paul to come to him "concerning the faith in Christ," he was probably looking for some interesting debate regarding the age-old question, "If a man die, shall he live again?"

The intellectual acuity of the apostle Paul got to him the very first time they met as he "reasoned of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come." Felix had perhaps a certain respectability but no fear of God. He trembled under the convicting words of the Holy Spirit through God's servant, but there was no repentance. He had an opportunity that day and on occasions after that but there was no action on the part of Felix toward God. By his greedy procrastination wanting Paul to bribe him with money for a release, he put himself in a position of having no hope. When no money was forthcoming from Paul, he then tightened up his restrictions until when two years had passed, and Festus took over the governorship, Paul was bound.

Two years is a long time to wait for something to happen. Paul knew he was going to Rome, so the time waiting would also be a time wondering what God was going to do. Luke and probably others were there too, so there would have been time for quiet discourse over spiritual truths as well as the ways God had led them up until that time. News would come from visiting saints as to how the work of God was progressing and as to what was happening to give concern. Maybe this was the time Paul did not cease to pray for the saints in various assemblies. Times will come in most of our lives when we feel we have been shelved rather than being active in God's work. Those waiting times often come to older saints who cannot get out much and spend day after day alone with no Christian fellowship. There are times as well when illness happens and activities have to be curtailed. In those private times alone, we may have opportunities of special fellowship with the Lord and our intercession on behalf of others, rises to a different height that we have ever experienced before.

God does not have to give us an account as to why things are the way they are. He gives us the blessing of letting our undivided attention be on Him in those waiting times. Then our perspective of the great work of God unfolds to our minds as never before. There is a lot going on in the world for God that we are not very aware of until we are not able to engage in any activity of our own. In those times of waiting we may have our highest spiritual experiences with God.

It is not what we had hoped for when we must wait -
Usually those times are imposed.
However, when on God's grace and truth we contemplate -
We find again what we thought we would lose.
God draws near to us in a very special way
When we're not busy moving about -
And speaks peace to us when we have nothing to say -
And we hear plainly - He doesn't have to shout.

In those times we are waiting for something to happen -
We are not distracted by time or things.
Our haste to the work has impoverished us often -
To the spirituals God wants us to bring.
Now in the quiet waiting by day and by night -
He has our undivided attention.
In those times He can shed on us some light -
As the value He places on our affection.

When we are not bustling about busy here and there -
But are captive to the bonds of time.

God is able to make us much more aware
Of the obligations I forgot were mine.
I should never overlook the state of the flock -
Or think other's problems mean nothing to me.
It may be far better for me to kneel than walk -
So that God's view of things I can see.

"Father, I have to confess I feel frustrated by inactivity. It doesn't happen often, But I confess to Thee I can think more clearly, pray more earnestly and plan more wisely in waiting times than in busy times. Help Thy servant to be a balanced person who knows when to wait and when to work. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

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

THE FAITH IN CHRIST.

It has a solid basis, this body of truth we teach
Concerning the Messiah from heaven who was sent.
Scriptures at the beginning told of the devil who would reach
To mankind by quoting God, but bending what He meant.

From Genesis to Revelation, "faith in Christ" is the key,
To understanding the reason sacrifices were made.
Substitution was the plan when a perfect lamb you see
Takes the sinner's place when his hand was placed upon its head.

"The faith in Christ" includes that He became a man,
Though never ceasing to be the Son of God.
As man He came to die, for that was God's own plan,
We must believe and trust Him as our Savior and Lord.

The Christ who died for us, rose the third day from the dead,
Receiving all who come to God through Him.
Now as members of His body - He only is the Head,
They wait His return to take with Him every one of them.

"The faith in Christ" unfolds knowledge of the future,
Because He lives, we all shall rise again.
A resurrection awaits, a changed body and nature,
We only know a little of what happens then.

The Church which is His Bride, will be ever at His side,
Meaningful labor will be placed into our hands.
Where He lives, there we will be, ever to abide,
And yet fully involved in carrying out His plans.

"The faith in Christ" to me, means I will always be,
A part of what God has and is forever doing.
As limited as I am, I am privileged even now to see,
Some results and changes made in many human beings.

That brings glory and honor to Christ even here and now,
What a great joy it will be when His plans are all complete.
I will marvel at my little part; for sure I will wonder how,
I can glorify Him by remembering Calvary's mercy seat.

"I thank Thee, O God, for revealing the faith in Christ to me in this day of grace and blessing. I rejoice in Christ; I am blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ; I find faith in Christ most reasonable - and I worship Thee this morning because of such a Savior who came into the world to save sinners. In His name, Amen."

Acts 24:27. *"But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix room: and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound."*

WILLING TO SHOW THE JEWS A PLEASURE.

To try to please people is nothing new; it happened since the beginning of man. To make people feel good has been a priority with many folks. Some would rather lie than see the disapproving expression cross the face of a person. It makes us uncomfortable to see others' frowns, we would rather see their smile, even if it

an insincere one. So, whether a thing is good or bad, we naturally please if we can. The problem with this is that it is a form of deception.

A governor like Felix, was given the office to basically keep the peace for the Roman government. He had to be courteous to Paul because he was a Roman. Yet he was aware of the type of people the Jewish leaders were. They accused Paul of being a troublemaker saying that he was causing riots among the Jews all over the world. Their second accusation was he was a ringleader of an unrecognized religious sect, which was against Roman law. Thirdly, Tertullus accused Paul of trying to desecrate the temple. Their hope was that Paul would be executed because of these accusations.

These charges were too vague to be substantial and Paul refuted each of them point by point. At the same time, he was able to present the Gospel message through his defense. The general accusations made against him were without any specific evidence. Felix had been governor for about six years so he was well acquainted with "The Way," which would have been a topic of conversation among Roman leaders. Christians were already well known as peaceful people. Felix should have released Paul if he was willing to do what was right. He did what so many others do when they are confronted with righteousness and truth – he deferred making a decision.

Paul's ability to present the faith in Christ in such a way promoted an interest in Felix and his wife. But when the subjects of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come arose, he did not want to face the personal side of the message and turned away. The Gospel message is about the power to change lives and destinies and is not effective until it moves from principles and doctrines to a life-changing dynamic. When people turn away from our witness, it is evidence that the Gospel has been made personal to them.

Felix lost his job as governor and he lost the money in bribes he hoped Paul would give him. He lost his integrity by the choices he made. He lost the opportunity of accepting the Lord Jesus Christ. He probably lost his soul. The only thing that characterized the summation of his life was – he was willing to show the Jews a pleasure.

"I am reminded, O Righteous Father, of those who have turned away from the message of the Gospel because of friends they have. There are others also, who think they would not be effective in their job if they had to live and work with integrity and to please Thee. Give them another opportunity to make a conscious decision to come and hear the Gospel again. I am afraid for them that they will be like Felix; "willing to show the Jews (friends, workmates) a pleasure" and leave the Lord Jesus entirely outside of all their thoughts and life. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 25

A MAN IN BONDS

The central figure of all history and the Subject of the life-changing Gospel message is the Lord Jesus Christ. It is determined by God that every knee shall bow to Him and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Frail mortal men often have the mistaken idea that they are the masters of their own life and their destiny is in their own hands - "if there is life after death." Festus seemed to take himself and the official position he held very seriously. He didn't wait long, only three days, before he went to Jerusalem to establish his authority in that hotbed of discontent and public opposition to Rome. In our service for God, we will often find it difficult to get permission to rent public places for preaching the Gospel or to speak publicly in the open air. Some people want bribes. Some are linked to local congregations and they use their position of authority to support the religion of their choice. Our reasonable response to unreasonable men and unreasonable decisions can open the door to do the work to which we are called rather than to resist them by countercharges or demands to "our rights." Occasionally we will have to take our position as citizens and defend our work in a court of law, because "we ought to obey God rather than men." But usually those who bluster and bluff will not persist in an unreasonable course of action when faced with calm assurance of those who trust in the Living God - and if necessary, legal exposure.

Two years had passed and Paul was still not a free man. The Jews were still openly opposed to Paul and at the first opportunity wanted Festus to have Paul come to Jerusalem so they could kill him on the way. God's decision was to have Paul go to Rome. The Jews decision was to kill him. One has well written in a hymn, "In vain do earth and hell oppose, for God is stronger than His foes." There is no way the schemes and plans of men, be they great or small, stop God's plans from being fulfilled. This provides great assurance to us when we are furthering the work of God in the place, and in the way He intends. It is our privilege to be instruments in His hands to accomplish His work. Let us never get side-tracked by threats and opposition. Paul's example of submission is one we do well to follow. The two years that seem wasted were part of

God's plan. Preparation times are often long while the objective may be accomplished in a very short time. God was able to have His servant do publicly in an hour or two what Paul had waited two years for.

False charges by their very nature are quite easily discerned even by ungodly men. The same unfounded charges were laid against Paul that had been made two years before. Again, Paul's answer was respectfully given and positively answered. A fact we know to be true is those who are allied in some way against God, will not undermine each other. Festus, Felix and Pilate all sought to please the Jewish leaders even when the charges and decisions were totally unreasonable and/or false. Sometimes we are amazed at the foolish charges and responses to the work of God. The reasons for opposition have no point at all and the charges are obviously without foundation. And yet they get away with it. Paul's great statement of appeal must have startled all who were at that hearing. He declared his innocence and the governor knew he was innocent of all the charges against him. But to fulfill God's plan and purposes he went over the heads of all who were there and claimed his right as a Roman citizen. By this time the escalation of the matter had taken on large proportions that both Festus and his council, and the high priest and the Jews, knew were serious. Paul in complete trust in the will of God could calmly declare his innocence. Now the deceitful actions of both the accusers and the government official were in danger of full exposure. When such decisions have to be made in our lives, it is important that our motives are right before God and our appeal is righteous. Now instead of being on the defensive, when those who oppose are exposed, they are the ones in danger.

Legally, Festus had no choice but to defer to Paul's appeal. The priest and his people had no other recourse but to go home and await the outcome. God's power was now the overruling force of subsequent actions and the powerlessness of men no longer had any influence. One sentence from Paul took the whole matter out of Festus authority and the false charges of the Jewish leaders, and place it in the hands of a far greater authority. A careful evaluation of a matter by a faithful servant acting in fellowship with God, can bring a conclusion rather quickly. The continuation of an argument, charges and counter-charges have no end to them. Paul's consistent life and testimony was there to be seen. His dignity and calmness was easy to see. His faith in "One, Jesus," was out in the open without any deception. "Jesus was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive." How can any charge be laid against him? When under the challenge of false charges, the wise defender of the faith clarifies simply and plainly the message of the Gospel. That is the word from God. Prove it wrong if you can. Prove Jesus who lived, died and was buried, and has been testified that He is alive, is not alive. The tumult that resulted from Paul's message whenever and wherever it was given was because of "Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive."

Festus may have spoken those words in sarcasm and ignorance but he knew what the issues are when it comes to the truth of the Gospel. The immoral, ungodly leadership that gathered to hear Paul's defense must have been very defensive themselves in front of the calm, quiet assurance of God's man who could look each person in the eye, and with clear conscience tell of his "manner of life." The history of Agrippa and Bernice would have been an embarrassment to most people. They probably lived constantly under the conviction of a bad conscience. Great pomp and ceremony cannot compare with the power of holy simplicity. A sinful life, a bad conscience, latent hatred, suppressed fury are all exposed without a word. A consistent life, calm words, reverence and respect for God fulfills a man's duty before God and man, and testifies that this person is one who walks in the light with God.

When standing before ungodly men, there is physical evidence that shows.
One who does not to pressure bend, has an authority no accuser knows.
Because he has hope and his faith is real, God is his authority
To whom he submits and before Him kneels - His judgments are for eternity.

People will oppose and complain, because faith is in a Higher Person than man.
Their objective is to lay on you blame, and pass a guilty verdict if they can.
Fear not, their feeble opposition is doomed to failure and ultimate defeat.
No fearful threat or proposition, moves the Judge who all must meet.

In life we will not be popular or favored, because the Gospel, sin does expose.
The life we have in Christ is only savored, by those who God's grace really knows.
We can't expect those who live in the darkness, to appreciate the value of light.
Those who reject God when His grace harkens, don't understand faith - only sight.

There is a dignity, calmness and respect, when one lives consciously before his God.
In those who deny, refuse and reject, a deep-seated resentment is influenced by the world.
The one lives with assurance this will pass, the future before him is bright.
The other without solid truth to grasp, will go further into the dark night.

"I thank Thee Father, for the fellowship with those who walk in the light with Thee. To one it seems like I can identify with Paul and others who were challenged and changed without any basis for their opposition. Many are silent now but please keep Thy servant with a sense of dependence on Thee at all times, so I will be ready for any disturbance that will come. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 25:19. *"But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive."*

ONE JESUS.

Not an uncommon name - but an uncommon Person
This One Jesus!
Alive forever, yet virgin born - predicted from the beginning
This One Jesus!
Written about for generations long before His birth - and waited for
This One Jesus!
Scriptures of truth fulfilled - His birth, His life, His death prophesied
This One Jesus!
His teaching, His walk, His manner of life, His miracles - all unique
This One Jesus!
His death was vicarious: scriptural predictions fulfilled precisely by -
This One Jesus!
Just as was written, just as He said - resurrection power that justifies by -
This One Jesus!
Changed lives because of faith in Him; testimonies world-wide to -
This One Jesus!
Good news going everywhere; forgiveness of sins is possible because of -
This One Jesus!
Young lives start on paths of honor; living with meaning and purpose for -
This One Jesus!
Men and women in their strength, giving of themselves - all of themselves for
This One Jesus!
Older people waiting for the last enemy, also waiting for the coming of -
This One Jesus!
The last moments of life show with widened eyes and a smile on the face, a sight of
This One Jesus!
The failing world-system; all of groaning nature; sinful nations will submit to -
This One Jesus!
Every knee bowed; every tongue confesses to the glory of God -
This One Jesus!

"Father God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: I have written some thoughts concerning Thy Son. May they be appropriate to the uniqueness that is singularly His. There is none that can compare with Him and I was not trying to make any such comparison. To me He is altogether lovely. I worship at the mention of His name, Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 25:19. *"But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive."*

AFFIRMED TO BE ALIVE.

Born among men - witnessed to by angels - seen and worshiped by shepherds:
Alive - and laid in a manger.

Moved to a house - creation witnesses to His life by a star - searched for by wise men:
Alive - and receiving gifts.

Carried to the temple - a newborn boy - temple ceremony - witnesses are waiting believers:
Alive - and prophecies are fulfilled.

Threatening words - marching soldiers killing small boys - an angel's warning voice:
Alive - and in Egypt like the prophet said.

Growing and favored by men and God - obedient Son - about His Father's business:
Alive - and confounding the learned with His wisdom.

Out of obscurity into public light - baptized by John - witnessed to by God and nature:
Alive - and the Lamb of God is identified.

Chosen men - a national work to do - the Gospel is preached - repentance is called for:

Alive - and the message sounds across the cities and towns of Israel.

On the mountain - in a boat - in the temple court - by the side of Galilee - His word is heard:
Alive - and the teaching of the kingdom is presented.

In homes - on the streets - in private - in public - at a grave - at a wedding - powerful by
diversity:
Alive - and miracles are performed.

In an upper room - in a garden - in a palace - in a courtroom - in the streets bearing a cross:
Alive - and doing a redemptive work.

Nailed on the cross - reproaches - humiliation - crown of thorns - bearing our sins -
suffering:
Alive - and seen by multitudes who watched Him.

In deep darkness - in lonely suffering - enduring righteous judgment - waves passing over
His soul:
Alive - until He knew all was accomplished.

Willingly dismissing His spirit - publicly declaring an accomplished work - His Person
acknowledged:
Alive - until He chose to die.

A weekend death - a temporary grave - a testimony to the Gospel - a separation from the
physical body:
Alive - but not in His body.

A new day is arriving - morning dawns - women come - the stone is moved - the grave is
empty:
Alive - in the body.

Mary - Peter - two walking on a road - James - the disciples - Thomas - over 500 in Galilee -
Paul near Damascus: Alive - and seen and heard.

**“O Father; How full I am inside my mind and heart as I am again affirmed that Jesus is
alive. “Hallelujah, Christ arose!” He is alive! Amen.”**

Acts 26:4. *“My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among my own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews.”*

MANNER OF LIFE.

Whenever the story of salvation we tell,
We usually go back to the first.
It was there, when we were still on the road down to hell,
That conviction of sin our pride burst.

Even though I was good by the standards of men,
That in itself was no good.
It seemed the more satisfied in self I became,
The farther away from God that I stood.

It is true I didn't do what others thought fun,
Because I was raised to know better;
I still was not saved and to hell would have gone,
Knowing the message of grace to the letter.

I knew I was sinful though I wasn't too bad
By the standards that people want to live.
My manner of life taught by Mother and Dad,
Was a reflection of the model they gave.

But when the time came God spoke clearly to me,
It was in a time when the Gospel was preached;
I finally listened and then began to see,
It is lost sinners that Christ came to reach.

It wasn't the good, because there really is none,
It was sinners that Christ came to save.

There no good sinners found, not even a one;
Every one of us is in need of God's grace.

Like Paul when the Lord spoke to him in the dust on the road,
I too, had in nothing to boast.
Though the manner of life may to many seem good;
The Lord Jesus came here for the lost.

Before salvation we found out none is good;
Then when Jesus was presented so plain;
To accept Him as Savior and submit to the Lord,
Brought life and I (and Paul) was born again.

Now as proof and evidence of a work in the heart;
The twice born want their Lord to obey.
When truth is presented; right at the start;
We want to respond to what He will say.

Life is not mine to live any more;
Just the way others and I want to choose.
We are not our own, we own Jesus is Lord,
And self-life we are glad now to lose.

“Father in heaven, may I really keep my manner of life in this new life I live, consistent with the faith I profess. I do not want to live a self-centered life of pride, but one of submission and spiritual grace. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Acts 26

FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

After two years of waiting and wondering about the future and when God was going to send him to Rome, Paul was summoned to a hearing. This time it would be before people who came in worldly splendor, self-centered dignity and ceremony. It was a gathering of the elite of society to be entertained at the expense of one man in chains. Agrippa and Bernice in their finery, Festus in the colors of his office, and all the high dignitaries in their splendor, did not intimidate Paul. He knew he was there to represent the Highest of the high when it came to authority. He was to speak for the King who was over all kings and whose glory outshines all glory of all ages put together. When we are privileged to speak for God, a quiet dignity has far greater impact on the onlookers than all the glamorous clothing and trappings of man-made authority. One who knows who he is, and knows who God is, and knows his God personally and intimately, does not have to rely on a vain empty show to impress an audience of people. The light of God will be on his countenance and the respect one has for God - and himself, and reverence for God and His authority, will be evident for all to see.

Paul was happy to be there. He really was because he said so, but also because he was finally able to tell the Gospel to a king and to those in authority. Being set apart and alone in that company did not embarrass him because the promise made long before, was happening. There is real joy when a soul-winner is doing what God wants and has promised no matter what the surrounding circumstances are. Most people are interested when a personal story is being told with respect for the hearers and yet with the conviction of personal experience. Agrippa knew the background as soon as Paul identified his accusers as Jews and himself as a Jew who was a believer in Christ. "Unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews." In giving a public testimony of one's conversion to God, do as Paul did, and briefly tell of who you were before God saved you. He did not dwell at length on every part of his life. His childhood and early manhood were quickly and effectively recalled only as it was relevant to the Gospel. It takes a lot of time to say a little when we are not prepared. A lot can be said in few words if we are prepared. What Paul was taught, his lifestyle, his conduct, his occupation and what he believed were all very clearly and precisely stated. He quickly established a connection with the audience.

Then Paul got very specific as to what happened at the time of his salvation. What he believed, as to the resurrection of the dead was well known by the king. In his testimony, Paul made it personal, "I saw...", "I heard...", "I said..." The light brighter than the sun was real. The voice in his own language was clearly heard and its message was understood. The words he heard, and what he said, still resonated in his soul as he came in deep repentance to God. Repentance is not just a feeling of sorrow. It is an admission of guilt and commitment to change that is evident in a reversal of thought and direction. It is never a slight bowing of the

head before confession in words of faith in Christ. Repentance brings one to a full stop before God, a change of, and reversal of life from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

Instantly Paul submitted to Jesus as Lord, and confessed him with his mouth. All he really knew at that moment was Jesus. But that is what eternal life is. "To know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." Salvation is what God gives us when we come to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith, and submit to Him as our Lord to obey. Following the question, "Who art Thou Lord?" came another question, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" All that became clear to Paul, when he realized now, he was a servant of Jesus Christ as his Lord, and he was a representative of Him to others, both Jews and Gentiles. A person who has repented to God and put faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, isn't one who is left floundering by God who he serves. There are some who let their own feelings and ambitions get in the way of submission and obedience. They often spend a lot of wasted time wondering about themselves and their salvation. We need to help such people get to the word of God so they too will see, hear and act on what God says.

In giving a personal testimony of saving faith by God's grace, we need to be very plain when speaking about the Lord Jesus and His death, burial and resurrection. It is that which makes people turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. It is that message that tells us of forgiveness of sins and the inheritance we have by faith in Christ. The Gospel separates us from the world and separates us unto God and to His people who have experienced the same saving grace and now live a different life with a different goal by a different power. The "before" part of a testimony tells why I needed to be saved. The "how" part of a testimony gives the way conviction of sin and regeneration happened as the word of God brought life and light by the Spirit of God. The "after" part of a testimony shows the change and results of putting one's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Obedience to God is obvious. One who God saves is not only converted but there is the inward desire to obey God. Paul's obedience to God led him to Damascus, Jerusalem, Judea and then to the Gentiles in various nations. What is in the Gospel message that so disturbs people today as it did in Paul's day? It is that the word of God is preached without any additions to suit the ideas of men. The Gospel message has not changed. Christ had to suffer for our sins. The Jews didn't want a suffering Messiah. They wanted a conquering Messiah. People today want an easy Jesus who doesn't challenge their conscience. Paul preached that Christ would rise from among the dead and as a result there would be the light of understanding to both Jews and Gentiles who would believe in Him. People today do not want to hear that Jesus is the only Way, only Truth, the only Life by which we can come to God. People of all ages who repent and believe the Gospel, would know who Jesus is; they would know why they were here and should put their faith in Him. They would have a purpose for living and a sure hope in the future.

Festus who had no background or understanding of Judaism was sure Paul was out of his mind and loudly proclaimed that. Many people still think it is totally ridiculous to believe the death, burial and resurrection of Christ is the only way of salvation from sin. Those who believe in the emptiness of atheism cannot conceive of love like the Lord Jesus had for us. But Agrippa knew. He was aware of all of the truth of all the things Paul said, and was doubtless very uneasy by the challenge and conviction that accompanies the preaching of the Gospel. Festus was ignorant but moved. Agrippa was convicted, challenged, uneasy but unwilling to repent and act on what he knew to be true. These same responses accompany the preaching of the Gospel today. Some will just set aside any moving of the Holy Spirit upon them and will continue on in life the same as before. Others may become harder against the Gospel in an effort to distance themselves from its consequences. We must be faithful to the calling we have received and not miss any opportunity to obey God and give testimony to what we have personally experienced.

The first time when called to give a testimony to God's saving grace,
We were probably feeling afraid we might bring to our Lord disgrace.
But by His gracious Holy Spirit, a few words spoken in fear -
Made us a little stronger in faith when people stopped to hear.

As time passes by there is more of our understanding of the event.
We then realize God was bringing us to where we were willing to repent.
Conviction of sin was real, and we were lost wondering what we could do.
Then by the clear presentation of the Gospel, we learn what Jesus passed through.

By our background we gave fertile soil for the word of truth to enter.
And the clear Gospel preaching always does on the Person of Christ to center.
By looking to Him instead of self, or works that salvation we may attain,
We learned by His sacrifice for us, through the Holy Spirit we are born again.

To be able to tell others of Him and His love that led Him to die,

We can help them see for themselves what Jesus did, and why.
His suffering had a most selfless reason, He died to bring us to God.
Faith in Christ and His work is the Gospel message both here and abroad.

So when opportunities come, be ready to speak a true "word in season."
Tell people what Christ did for you, and that is now the reason
You speak your word of testimony that it might be a blessing to them.
And you are speaking in Christ's name when you urge them to come to Him.

"Father, when the opportunity arises, help me to be ready to speak for Thee by telling people what You did for me. May the words I was able to speak in testimony to that couple have some effect upon them I pray. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

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

THE KING KNOWETH.

Every thinking person knows there is much they cannot do.
We open our eyes and see evidence of God when we look around
Of a Power beyond us and limits set, beyond which we cannot go;
Whether the universe of stars or things we see when we look down.

We know men can't make life, though science tries in vain to make it happen.
There is a key God holds that is impossible for mortal men to claim.
When God draws near in grace, the darkened mind is wakened,
And reasonable men admit humankind and God are not the same.

It is possible to know what's right and still commit to doing wrong.
There's a part of us that never wants to submit to authority.
The foolish pride of man convinces himself that he is strong -
But those who think that way, the light of truth choose not to see.

To know about the Lord and God's great redemptive grace,
Is possible and still a man or woman be forever lost in hell.
A person may in doubt, all the ways of God will trace -
With evidence in front of them, perish under Satan's spell.

A king knew the old, old story - was almost persuaded to believe -
But that epitaph remains the only legacy of his reign.
Very few really know his deeds - many know he did not receive
The Christ of God as his Savior - his soul was lost, life he did not gain.

I fear that many people know the same things as that prideful king.
They fear embarrassment or rejection from the fickle crowd.
"Almost Persuaded" is a warning Gospel song we sing -
Reminding us of the importance of a testimony spoken loud.

"As an intercessor Father God, I come to Thee on behalf of those who have attended these meetings. They seem interested in the messages to the extent they can listen to opinions we give. When it comes to wanting to understand the Gospel for personally, they seem far removed from wanting the grace of God. Have mercy on them, O God and bring conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment upon them by the power of the Spirit of God. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 27:3. *"And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself."*

UNTO HIS FRIENDS.

A common Source of uncommon interest - not just a passing game;
These were friends who kept in touch even when they seldom came
To a place they could meet and have good fellowship face to face,
But often they met together in spirit when they met at the throne of grace.

Their commitment was primarily based on each being committed to God.
An interest was deepened on each one's part - each was redeemed by precious blood.
The claims of Christ on each held them with velvet bands of love.
Each knows the value of a soul sharing the blessings each one had.

More important than their occupation and often family ties,
Is a friendship based on faith in God - that's where such friendship lies.
Testing times because of faith or work in the kingdom will come.
These times draw friends closer finding spiritual refreshment in their homes.

Pressures come from the world around and sometimes from within.
We find refreshment to the soul especially when confronted with some sin.
That's when a friend is needed most when there's a load too hard to bear,
And the friend is there to talk to and is willing the burden to share.

Even those who don't know grace, nor have they experienced God's salvation,
Recognize the value of friendship, like Julius during Paul's incarceration.
I may not be actually in chains but there are bonds from time to time -
A kindred spirit or a special friendship assures me the load's not only mine.

Friendship goes two ways - each one is blessed and encouraged by the other.
A friend who drops in unexpectedly is as welcome as father and mother -
Because I know my friend is as glad to see me as I am glad to see him.
True friends know, generally speaking - I have nothing to hide from them.

There is One Special Friend it's true, whose holy friendship is unique.
Many times a day, His friendship and guidance do I seek.
He is always near to hear my call and give good counsel to me.
Now, and through eternal ages ahead, friendship with the Lord will always be.

"It truly is refreshing, Gracious Father, when Christian friends get together. Sometimes it is those unexpected times that are the most significant. Paul would certainly have been refreshed after the tensions of the hearings he had to endure and the slow journey on that ship. May I have a sensitivity to the need of friends. I have a fear of imposing on them and I think sometimes I have missed an opportunity to be a help or blessing. Give me the spiritual eyesight to act on what the Spirit guides me to do. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 27

I BELIEVE GOD

Experiences in life often define a person. Most people are identified not only by their name but also by their occupation. In following the path of Paul in his four journeys, the phrase, "I believe God," characterizes his life and service. From the very first meeting with the Lord Jesus Christ, to the end of his last journey, there was an unmistakable desire on his part to do God's will. The contrast between God's will and man's plans for life is illustrated in his journey to Rome. The goal was Rome. Paul knew he was going to get there because God had told him so. How he would get there and the events on the way were not revealed to Paul. There is no question as to where a child of God is going. When Christ "suffered the Just for the unjust," He did that so He might bring us to God. By God's grace we are brought to Him positionally, and nothing or no one will "pluck" us out of His hands. But the journey home is only described in general terms. The events between when we set sail for heaven, and when we finally get there are hidden from us for the most part until we are experiencing them.

It was a comfort to Paul that Luke and Aristarchus were with him. The daily experience of fellowship with like-minded people has always been a blessing. Whether they were traveling as prisoners is not stated, although Aristarchus was identified as a "fellow-prisoner" in a letter from Paul. Not all believers experience the same things on our homeward journey. I may never fully enter into all the pressures of life, all the emotional and physical stress or all the blessings and disappointments of other saints. But it is possible for me to assist them by bearing burdens for them when I am able and they are known to me. Luke and Aristarchus may not have had the same "care for all the churches" that Paul did, and they did not share the same apostolic responsibilities, but they were there with him day after day. They would hear him speak and could provide for his needs as best they could. They could comfort him by their presence. We may best serve our fellow travelers by sitting with them instead of going off to labor on their behalf. A hymn sung with quiet consideration of the thoughts expressed in the words, and some verses of scripture read well is often the best help we can give a brother or sister in Christ. Earnest prayer on behalf of those who are in need of comfort often provides the needed mercy and grace in the time of need.

Difficulties and dangers on our way home to heaven are to be expected because we are "in the world, but not of the world." So "strangers and pilgrims" are going to be watched from a distance, and their manner of life scrutinized by a skeptical world of people who have made the world their home. Each of the stops Paul

made had a certain characteristic to it. In Sidon, Paul's Christian friends provided for him and would give him some encouragement at the beginning of his six-month journey. Soon the winds were against them. There are degrees of opposition in the life of a believer the same as there are in the life of an assembly. Satan's opposition will come in various ways. Sometimes the headwinds are such that we feel we are getting nowhere. Criticism of the way we work and how we preach is inevitable because if the enemy can discourage the servant enough, he will quit the work. Indifference also is a headwind that blows against the enthusiasm of an earnest worker who for weeks, months and maybe even years, has put his efforts into a work that seems to be stalled. Casual compromise by others who we have worked with is a danger because we will think maybe we have been too hard or have expected too much. If we had been more "seeker friendly," more like society around us, we might have been more successful.

What seemed to the casual observer to be finally a relief when the south wind blew softly, was only a deception to turn away the leadership of Paul's party from the reality of what lay ahead. When the sailing is smooth in life and we think finally there will be lasting peace and comfort in our labors, take warning and take earnest care. There will be no lasting peace and rest until we get into our final harbor and the Father's house. We can be calm in the storm, but every storm will not be made calm. Some things we will have to endure for a lifetime. God often draws closer to us at such times rather than in the times when the "south wind" blows softly. The force of the northeast wind soon changed everyone's mind as to the decision to move ahead in spite of Paul's warning. When the affairs of life seem to be out of control, we need to remember that "God know the way that I take." When all seems hopeless to the natural man, the spiritual man remembers the promises of God - not to take us out of the storm or to stop it, but to take us through it. We not be able to see God there, but we know He is there. "Thou will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee." The impact of quiet strength, calmness under pressure, and a person living conscious of the presence of the Lord's presence with him or her, will be seen by those who sought to do things their own way. There will be adverse effects because of all the difficulties and dangers we must pass through in life, but the lasting blessings far out-weigh those negative things.

Before the storm had taken its toll on the ship, Paul had become the undisputed leader of the two hundred seventy-six people on board. We may underestimate the value of a simple statement spoken in faith, but the words, "I believe God," had the effect of changing the attitude of all on that ship in their present danger. The simple act of praying a prayer of thanksgiving for food, encouraged all who were there to put their trust in God alone. It may have been that when God promised to "give thee all that sail with thee," that the whole shipload of people became Christians. We may never know all that will result from the actions of faith in God on the part of one man even in difficult and dangerous circumstances.

It is not in the blush of quiet beauty, where our faith is by others seen
As much as when in distress and difficulty, our senses are made more keen
To reflect on God's ways of dealing to bring about a promise He made -
When temptations and trials are highest, is when our trust in the Lord is stayed.

There is a tendency to wonder when the storms of life are so high -
To wonder if the Lord is near, or if for some reason He is passing us by.
Then by prayer and reflection through His word His promises we read.
And we are assured of His faithfulness that in this trial He will meet our need.

We have not been given a promise that from this difficulty we will escape.
But we do have the written assurance that us He will never forsake.
There is no way to escape from temptation, but in difficulty what shall we do?
He leaves us to be tossed and to struggle, and is with us all the way through.

So if it's fire or water, or flood and tempest so strong -
We need to show others by life, and work and attitude and song -
That our faith in our God does not waver, in Him we have put our trust.
Our confidence in Him is forever, He can do whatever He must.

"I believe God," is our watchword, from that testimony we won't turn aside.
"I believe God," means I know Him and in Him is where I abide.
"I believe God," is a statement of faith, it means self-will I will lay down.
"I believe God," is my testimony to others that His claims I will ever own.

"Father in heaven, it seems like the wind has been blowing more softly this week than last. The occasional flurries and gusts remind me I am not home yet nor am I done with whatever Thou would have me do. I wait upon Thee, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Acts 27: 25. *“Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.”*

I BELIEVE GOD.

God has not said there will never be,
Problems that arise or stormy sea. were with him.
God has not said we will always be,
Accepted by men whoever they be.
God has not said there will be no pain.
God has not said troubles won't happen again.

What God has promised is that He will never leave
Us to be forsaken, or forever to grieve.
What God has promised is to lead us aright;
What God has promised dark turns to light.

God has not promised a life of success,
With bountiful crops: more rather than less.
God has not promised He will always bless,
Each choice that I make in my busyness.
God has not promised to give each wish that I make,
Or to always agree with each action I take.

But God has promised that when I chose His way;
He will lead and guide me day by day.
What God has promised is He will be a Father,
When we choose His will as His son or daughter.

God has not said all who hear will believe;
When we call on sinners, Christ to receive.
God has not said that each new saint will see,
Every thing in their life just the same as me.
God has not said there will be not dread,
As we look at the issues that lie ahead.

But what God has promised is when the valley is dark,
He will not leave me alone, but will never part
From being with us there when the way seems long;
Because He has promised to bring us safe home.

God has not promised I will always know,
The reason things happen or even the way I must go.
God has not promised He will always show,
To me the cause when I am brought down low.
God has not promised I will not have to grieve,
When the closest to me, some time have to leave.

But God has promised when I submit to Him,
He will use me here to be a blessing to men.
God has promised: so, for His truth I'll stand;
And along with all saints, He'll bring us "safe to land."

“Father, this is a new day with unseen and unknown events to unfold before me. I don't what the day holds, but I begin with worshipping Thee here in this room. I want to honor Thee in each conversation I hold this day. I want to express to some unbelievers the joy I have in Thee and that they can know if they come to Christ. I pray that when this day is over, there will have been some honor and glory brought to Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Acts 28:15. *“And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and the three taverns; whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.”*

THANK GOD FOR “BRETHREN.”

To most around, they are just common men,
Who they work with, and talk to every now and then.
They raise their families, and worship with them
On the first day of the week; together they're seen -
They are brethren.

Most are not rich, but there are a few,
Who sponsor unseen - others in the work they do.
Most would not stand out in front of you,
But they are different, and their lives will show -
They are brethren.

We don't always agree about everything;
Our backgrounds affect the opinions we bring
From the way we study; to the way we sing;
But when it comes right down to the important things -
We are brethren.

Most of the brethren, I have never seen;
They live in places I have never been;
But from the far north to the Caribbean,
I know by name many of these faithful men -
Who are brethren.

We have worked together in preaching the Word.
We have talked and shared thoughts about our Lord.
We have sharpened each other like a file on a sword;
Some of these have already gone to their reward -
Faithful brethren.

We meet new folks nearly every day;
Sometimes a handshake; other times there's a lot to say.
And I have learned that along life's way;
Some are doing well - others have feet of clay -
But we still are brethren.

There are times when we would love to see a brother's dog;
The pressure is on and our work is in a fog;
It seems like nothing else could go wrong;
And when we are desperate, there comes along -
One of the brethren.

I know how Paul felt, I have been like that too;
It seems like the end is right in front of you;
You know God is there and He will always be true;
But somehow it is special, when out of the blue -
You meet the brethren.

I thank You Lord, for such men as these;
Who want God's will and are willing to please,
The Lord who called them and quickly seize
The opportunity to meet the needs -
Of the brethren.

"I thank Thee, Father, for those who I know and others that I meet who have a common interest in the things of God. It has always been a delight to me when the Spirit of God brings into my path or some part of my life, a brother or sister I never heard of before. Some have told me they pray for me. Others have shared their finances. Others have just wanted to talk and enjoy fellowship. How wonderful it is to be part of Thy family. Amen."

Acts 28

ROME AT LAST!

There would have been great weariness from lack of sleep and food for quite some time, but that did not stop the apostle Paul from helping to meet the needs of the group who had need of warmth. The people of Malta who kindly assisted the survivors of the shipwreck, thought Paul would die because of the bite of the viper. How like Satan to continue to oppose those who serve the Lord. The deceptive soft south wind; the hurricane force northeast wind, the desire of the soldiers to kill the prisoners and now the poison of the viper all failed to stop God's intention of having His servant get to Rome. The obstacles in the life of faith are not a hindrance to the will of God. Rather, they are unmistakable testimony to the faithfulness of God. Seeming delays are often really great opportunities. Opposition may be God's way of claiming the attention of an indifferent society. Natural disasters may be allowed as a wakeup call to a jaded and complacent nation.

What may seem to be the "half-empty glass" of failure, may be the "half-full glass" of blessing. One act of Satan in an attempt to kill God's servant before he got to Rome, was an opportunity to bring blessing to the people of Malta and glory to God. The difficulties we encounter need to be looked at as confirmation of the Gospel we preach.

The travel to Sicily and through the Straits of Messina, and then on to Puteoli was possible because of the south wind that blew. What one time had been a deceptive comfort was now a positive assistance in putting God's man to where He wanted him to be. Not every effort we put forth to further the work of God is effective the first time we try to use it. But unless there is some unscriptural reason for us to reject it, there is no reason to abandon it. Not every Gospel tract passed on will bear fruit. Not every series of Gospel meetings, will be a time when souls are saved. Not every message of edification, exhortation and comfort given with the purpose of blessing God's people, will be received. But that is no excuse for us to quit or turn away from the goal set before us by the Lord. A farmer may have years when his crops fail. The fisherman may go out to sea many times and catch nothing. But those lean times do not mean the farmer and fisherman quit their work. They continue going back to their labors because the principle of sowing and reaping is sound, tried and proven. Not every south wind is bad. Sometimes it is God's way of hastening His work to completion. Other times it deceives us into complacency. The difference is discerned by our commitment to maintaining close fellowship with God.

Seven days at Puteoli would have been a great encouragement to those brothers who had been five months or more away from the fellowship of an assembly of believers gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. They made it a point of finding Christians in that city, so both groups could be strengthened in their commitment to, and faith in, Christ. It is not always the length of a visit that counts. The willingness to search for believers means most to those who live there. Two different groups of believers heard Paul and those with him were coming to Rome and met them along the Appian Way. How blessed is the fellowship of God's people who are not ashamed to be identified with God's servants! Even though Paul was under the guard of Roman soldiers, when he entered the city of Rome, he came with dignity and honor.

The heart of the apostle Paul was still linked to his own people the Jews. Even though he was in chains, he wanted to give them a clear presentation of the Gospel. The soldiers who guarded Paul would have heard the Gospel from him. Perhaps they would have taken what they heard from Paul wherever they were posted. Those who became believers in Christ would have taken the testimony of the Gospel throughout the whole Roman empire as they traveled from place to place. However, Paul still wanted the Jewish leaders to hear from his own lips the charges made against him and his own testimony of personal faith in Christ. He identified himself with them and told them why he was chained - the hope of Israel. The future of Israel as prophesied in the Old Testament was then, and still is, a major hope of Jews everywhere. They were then and still are now, looking for a Jewish Messiah to reign over them. Paul had written about the Gospel of Christ previously to the assembly at Rome - "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." The silence from those who opposed Paul in Jerusalem, was probably so the ignoring of the unlawful ways of the Jewish leadership there, would not be reported to those in authority at Rome.

For one whole day Paul followed the same practice the Lord had used of opening the Old Testament scriptures and carefully explaining all they said about the promised Messiah. He would have told them how the Lord Jesus fulfilled those scriptures. Then those Jewish leaders would have to decide. "Will I act on what has been expounded from the scriptures? This testimony regarding the kingdom of God being here - is this true? What will I do with Jesus?" This pattern of presenting the Gospel is the same today. Our message is based on the scripture, not man's opinion. The testimony as to the new birth to enter the kingdom of God is not some human ordinance. There is the focusing of attention made on man's responsibility to repent and believe the Gospel. Any other kind of compromising preaching is not the Gospel of God. The results will be the same - some will believe and others will not. Truth divides people. Some will accept the truth of the Bible and others will deliberately reject the message, and the God of the message. Those results we will have to leave with God.

Luke began writing the book of Acts by telling Theophilus of "all that Jesus began both to do and teach" he recorded in his first treatise, the Gospel of Luke. Now he had continued to give an in-depth account of how the Christ-centered Gospel spread from place to place through the apostles, Stephen, Peter, Paul and others. Principles related to the work of the Lord that are taught in Acts are: The Gospel is Christ-centered; those involved in the work must be willing to sacrifice personal ambition, talents and themselves; be separated from the world to the Gospel. As evangelists (messengers) they take the word of God to unbelievers and when God saves people, they are to be gathered as autonomous and indigenous companies of saints in fellowship with those of "like precious faith." The resurrection of Christ and His glory motivates us to faithful service in spite of difficulties. They were not divided into denominations, nor known

by magnificent buildings or any other meeting places. There was no clergy or laity among those who gathered in the Lord's name. He was the Supreme Person among them who gathered in His name. There was no governing body of men over all the churches. Those who went out to preach were commended to the grace of God to fulfill the work of God called them to. They were not hired servants but trusted God to provide for their needs through their own labor or support of fellowship from those who wanted to be a part of what was being done in the kingdom of God. Those men were responsible for their own work and at the same time demonstrated accountability to those who supported them.

So as Luke wrote these words, and suddenly stopped writing when Paul was in "his own hired house" still preaching the kingdom of God and teaching "those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ," he left an unfinished history. The same work is still going on. The same message is still being preached. Even though there is much confusion, there are still those who carry on the way the apostles started the work in Acts. They do the same thing, under the same authority following the same practices, with the same results - some believe and some do not. May the on-going work of the Holy Spirit through God's people today be done in God's way - and under the power of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 28:31. *"Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him."*

THOSE THINGS.

- "The seed of the woman" - one of those things that tells us of the Christ.
- "Abel's more excellent sacrifice" - reminds us a Substitute can give a sinner life.
- "Noah's ark" - a place of safety: Christ, our ark from judgment yet to come.
- "Abraham's call," "Get out of Ur" - took him by faith to a new eternal home.

- "Isaac on the altar," is one of those things teaching us the need of a Sacrifice.
- "The Passover Lamb," reveals the one Perfect Sacrifice for us.
- "Jewish altars," the shedding of innocent blood, teaches "the wages of sin is death."
- "The serpent in the wilderness," one of those things teaching us to look by faith.

- "That Rock" in the wilderness reminds us of the water of eternal life.
- "The Tabernacle" and all its parts are truly of Christ a clear type.
- "Clothes and shoes that didn't wear out" - a thousand years to God is like a day.
- "To fear and doubt God's power" - for all sin there is a price to pay.

- "Manna," the bread from heaven, is a type of Christ Himself.
- There are so many types of Christ it takes a long time to tell
- "Those things" written there are that all men might surely know
- Jesus is the Christ; all those illustrations plainly show.

- In the New Testament too, the proofs are all there to see
- The Lord Jesus Christ is God, always has been and forever will be.
- "Those things" written of Him are all the testimonies we need -
- No person is exempt from faith - they must in Christ believe.

"O God of grace and mercy, it is wonderful evidence of Thy interest in mankind that so many examples, shadows and types of the Lord Jesus Christ are in the Old Testament as well as the personal testimonies in the New Testament. It is clear to me that those who would seek Thee will find Thee not only from the evidence of creation, conscience and the blessings of life, but from the scriptures that show many of the attributes and redemptive works of our Lord. I give thanks that these have been given, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."