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ChristianShepherd • Vol. 4 • No 11 • November 2000

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Editorial

Setting Examples

A young man was recently reminiscing about his childhood. He mentioned that the most vivid memory of his boyhood was his father's love of golf. It was a constant topic of discussion in their home, during times of work, play, and at the family dinner table. His father's great joy and excitement was to enthusiastically recount, with obvious delight, the details of his most recent game. Nothing else in life seemed to have so captured his father's heart as had golf—it was the constant subject of his conversation, the one great pleasure of his life.

It wasn't surprising to find that because of this influence, even before he went to junior high school, the young man had also become captivated by the game. By his own admission, since the time of his boyhood days—like his father—golf has been his one, sole passion. His friendships are determined and guided by an individual's interest in golf. Family and career considerations—every relationship of life—are ultimately controlled by this one overriding obsession. The father's love of the game has had its clear and lifelong impact on the son.

While making no judgements concerning the value of such activities, we do find the mind of God plainly expressed regarding spiritual things and natural things—“*bodily exercise is profitable for a little, but piety is profitable for everything.*” (1Tim. 4:8, JND Trans.). How important to keep such things in their proper balance in our lives!

But what is of much greater significance in this little account is that Christian fathers (and mothers too!) might be enabled to understand the powerful, lifelong influences which parental joys, interests and activities have on their own beloved children.

We often hear it said that *actions speak louder than words*. How true! Fathers, (and mothers) whose hearts are captivated by things of this passing world cannot hide the *true spring* of their delight from their childrens' eyes. The Lord Jesus said that it would be out of *the belly* of one satisfied with Himself, that *rivers of living water* should flow (Jn. 7:38).

And too, He has told us that it is *out of the abundance of the heart* that the mouth speaks (Matt. 12:34). Earlier the Lord told His disciples that "*where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*" (Matt. 6:21). Well may we ask, *what* and *where* is our treasure?

Sometimes parents wonder (and rightly so), what the key is to leading their beloved children into a deep abiding joy in Christ, a love of the assembly, and seeing them preserved from drifting into the world. By way of answering this vitally important question, we would ask—*What is the deep, abiding joy of your heart and life? What really causes you excitement and delight, dear dad and mom?*

Is some passing hobby, some recreation, or some particular career, that in which your heart is presently finding its pleasure? Then prepare to see your children taken up with such things too—rather than *the joy of the Lord*. Make no mistake, even faithful attendance at assembly meetings each week—

important as that is—cannot compete for your childrens’ attention, with the daily display you give them of what *really* captivates your heart.

It should not be surprising, if parents rarely give expression verbally or by action, of their *personal joy* in the Lord (Rom. 5:11), that their children show little or no interest in the Lord, His Word, or His assembly. How sad! Oh dear fathers and mothers! Can you, by word and by action, say in truth to your beloved children that Jesus is to your heart *chiefest among ten thousand*—that to you *he is altogether lovely* (S of S. 5:10, 16)?

How often have we read the yearnings of the bride in Solomon’s Song—*draw me, we will run after thee* (S of S. 1:4). May it be so with ourselves and our beloved children—parents’ hearts individually drawn in love and delight to the Lord Jesus, and then the dear lambs following after them, seeking that same divine Source of satisfaction and joy.

In Prov. 22:6 parents are admonished *train up a child in the way he should go* so that when he is old, he *will not depart from* the path of faith. The *key* to success in the spiritual training of our children is found just a few verses later (Prov. 23:26). “*My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.*”

Oh! that our hearts may be so attracted to and filled with Christ, that our joy in the Lord captures the hearts and eyes of our children!

“*A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things.*” (Matt. 12:35).

Ed.

“Looking upon Jesus as He walked”

Luke 11:1–23

Prayer is the expression of dependence. As the perfect Minister of the disciples' souls, Christ sets Himself to teach them, and you find a *form* of prayer presented. The Lord suits His words to their *then* condition. Prayer is the expression of the heart in its present condition.

The Lord then speaks of man going to a friend at midnight and asking for three loaves. “*And he from within*”—these are striking words. Are you *within*? It is a dangerous condition in this world. What I mean by that is, losing your sympathies with the joys and sorrows around you.

Here, the Lord shows out God's grace on the dark ground of that man's selfishness. Believers have not to *ask* and *seek* and *knock*, that is *importunity*. But “*Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*” See the divine readiness in answer to human necessities. Never say *importunity* is needed to move God.

Remember Daniel (Dan. 10). For *three full weeks* Daniel was chastening his heart before God, and no answer was given. At the end of that time the answer came. The angel told him that as soon as ever he began to pray, he was heard. However a certain transaction that was going on in heaven, hindered the answer. Though he went on in *importunity* for three weeks, but as soon as ever he had prayed, he was heard. So you may have been praying for a long

time, and getting no answer, but be sure the interval has been well employed. If not in heaven, in the chastening of your spirit.

There is no reluctance in God—not that selfishness to be overcome that there was in the man at midnight—but there may be reasons to delay the answer. Then, when it does come, it may be in a way you are little prepared for. Paul prayed three times, and the thorn was not taken away; but the answer came at last, and in a way he had not expected. The thorn was left until the day of his death, but he was given grace by which he could triumph in it.

After commenting on prayer the Lord enters (v. 14) on a solemn scene. Two antagonist thoughts come up to Christ—He who was constantly enduring the *contradiction of sinners against Himself*.

The first, representing a *perverted religion*, was set of the people come to charge Him with casting out devils by Beelzebub. The second, representing *infidelity* tempted Him, seeking a sign from heaven.

The Lord takes up the first of these by asking in exquisite beauty—“*If Satan . . . be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand?*” In answering this contradiction, He begins by showing them the folly of their thought. Would Satan be so foolish? Why are you so senseless? Then He presses in on their consciences. “*By whom do your sons cast them out?*” No doubt the kingdom of God had come unto them, therefore they were to take care what they were about—take care He says, [your faithless reasoning has put] you on dangerous ground.

excerpts adapted, Notes on Luke, J. G. Bellet

Thoughts on the Judgment Seat of Christ

In a previous article we considered the first three in David's list of mighty men in 2 Samuel 23. We saw that they held the first place in David's heart because of their exemplary courage and devotedness to him. Let us now consider the next three.

Abishai—courage without communion

Evidently there were three others who, although not in the same rank as the first three, were worthy of special mention. The first is *Abishai*, brother of Joab, and a first cousin of David. He is credited with lifting up his spear against three hundred, and was most honourable of the three, thus being their captain. He was surely a strong and unwavering supporter of David, and few were braver than he or more zealous of David's cause. When David wanted to make a dangerous visit to Saul's camp (1 Sam. 26), Abishai was a ready volunteer. When David was compelled to fight against Absalom, Abishai was captain of a third of the army. His name is prominent in other incidents in David's life. Why then was he not placed among the first three?

May we suggest that while Abishai was a most devoted and brave man, he did not share David's heart for the Lord and his understanding of God's ways. His energy for David's cause was sometimes exercised in a wrong way. He had to be restrained from killing Saul during the visit to Saul's camp (1 Sam. 26), and also had to be prevented from killing Shimei when he cursed David (2 Sam. 16). In 2 Sam.

3:39 David referred to Joab and Abisha saying, "These men the sons of Zeruah be too hard for me".

May this be a voice to our own souls. We may be very zealous for the Lord's glory, but do so with human energy. How many times have those who thought they were honouring the Lord used their energy in the flesh instead of in the power of the Spirit and in communion with the Lord! While the motive may be right, such actions tend to dishonour the Lord, for they don't display His character. God desires that we seek His interests in this world, but in keeping with His whole character. "*Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*" (Jn. 1:17).

Benaiah—growing in Christ

The next man in this group of three is Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, who was probably a young man. We note that his father was also a valiant man. This illustrates the *important influence fathers exert on their children*. While he did not at this time attain to the first three, we suggest that in type he is one who grew in his soul during David's reign. It is recorded that he slew two lionlike men of Moab, perhaps speaking to us of overcoming the power of Satan in those who would oppose us. Later he slew a lion in a pit, speaking to us of meeting Satan himself as an adversary. You and I as believers are able to "overcome the wicked one" (1 Jn. 2:13) because of our Saviour's victory over him.

Also, he slew an Egyptian which would speak to us of overcoming the world. Benaiah had only a staff in his hand, a type of the priesthood of Christ. (We

know that Aaron's rod spoke of priestly grace that brought the children of Israel through the desert.) With this staff he was able to take the spear away from the Egyptian and kill him with his own spear. So we also can overcome the world, if we recognize our weakness and avail ourselves of our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. How needful it is for young Christians to overcome both Satan and world, if they are to advance in spiritual things! Such victories, like those of Benaiah, must often be fought and won as individuals, out of the public eye. "*This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith*" (1 Jn. 5:4).

As a result of all these exploits, David set him over his guard, or as it might better be rendered, "*in his council*" (JND trans.)—a place where he could not only contribute but also learn from others.

Benaiah's history, however, does not end here. He is not mentioned often during David's reign but evidently was diligent in the limited responsibilities given to him, and he reaps an abundant reward later. When Solomon inherited the kingdom (a type of Christ reigning in millennial glory), we find that Benaiah is the instrument used to execute judgment on the king's enemies, and then is given the highest place—that of being over the host (1 Kng. 4:4). He had served in the background for many years while another who was not a man of faith occupied the place of captain of the host. But under Solomon Benaiah is accorded that place of honour.

May this encourage each heart. Those who serve down here out of the public eye—secretly learning

to overcome—will doubtless be given places of responsibility and distinction in the coming kingdom. Many things are not as they should be, but we may rest assured that in heaven all is just and according to God’s discerning eye. We must remember that the vindication of a life lived for the Lord may have to wait until that day. But this should be considered an honour, for our blessed Saviour will not be vindicated publicly until that day.

Jonathan—refusing the path of rejection

But what of the third man of this trio? Clearly there were three, yet neither in this chapter or in 1 Chron. 11 is the third one named, or even mentioned. Yet evidently he is meant to be included in the list, for while only thirty-six are named in the chapter, a total of thirty-seven is given at the end.

While not desiring to go beyond scripture, we would suggest that very likely Jonathan is the one who is in view here. He too was a valiant man, and the Lord used him and his armourbearer to win a great victory in the days of Saul (1 Sam. 14). Likewise he had a love for David like no other, and there is no record that he displeased David at any time. The lamentation David made over him in 2 Sam. 1 shows how much Jonathan meant to him.

Sadly, he did not follow David into rejection, and perhaps he is not named here because he never fought directly under David. He could not seem to rid himself of his connection with his father, despite his recognition that David was the rightful king.

Again, this should speak to our own souls. How

many dear believers today exhibit such love and devotedness to the Lord, yet are unwilling to give up that which is clearly not according to scripture! Many do not fully follow a rejected Christ, yet display love and grace in their lives that may put us to shame! May this history encourage us to be balanced Christians, having the unwavering faithfulness of Abishai with the love and grace of Jonathan.

We know that every type falls short of the reality, and how good it is to realize that while Jonathan's name may be omitted here, there will be no names omitted at the judgment seat of Christ. "*Then shall every man have praise of God*" 1 Cor. 4:5). Then, even a cup of cold water will not lose its reward!

B. Prost

Saints often think that it is an easy thing to serve God. But no; it is a hard thing to serve Him in *spirit and in truth*. To serve God in the sense of our being *nothing*, and His being *everything*, is a hard thing. The place of a servant is to hide himself and let God appear. It was thus with the *Perfect Servant*. Service should be connected with the being in secret with God. Thus we should serve happily and holily, desiring to glorify Him in our bodies and spirits.

excerpt, The Christian Friend, 1874

Doctrinal correction will never atone for the lack of brotherly love.

Spiritual Gems for the Path of Faith

Fishers of Men

“I will make you to become fishers of men” (Mk. 1:17)

The much loved prophet Jeremiah, in the midst of his tears was encouraged by this Word from the Lord: *“... it shall no more be said, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them; And I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers. Behold I will send for the many fishers, ... they shall fish them ...* (Jer. 16).

We see this in figure in the end of John’s gospel. (Chp. 21). The disciples had fished all night and caught nothing. This represents Jerusalem, and those whom she represents at the present. *“Thou hast forsaken me saith the Lord, ... her sun is gone down while it was yet day;”* (Jer. 15:6-9). *“... Hear, ... ye princes of the house of Israel; ... night shall be unto you, ... and it shall be dark unto you, ... and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them.”* (Mic. 3).

They had the sun set upon them *morally* at the cross, (Lk. 23:45), and *governmentally*, (in the figure of Elymas) that they *“should not see the sun, for a season.”* (Acts 13). But *a morning is coming* for those amongst them who fear His Name, when the *Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings.* (Mal. 3). Healing grace was coming for them.

This river brought life where it went, and provided *fish* for the fishermen. It went into the sea, and

the sea was healed, and there was “*a place to spread forth nets; there shall be according to their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many.*” (Ezk. 47:10).

“*But when the morning was now come, ...*” Jesus instructs them to “*cast the net upon the right said ... and ye shall find*”. The *right side* is the side of the temple out of which the healing waters flowed. “*... the waters came down from under from the right side of the house ...*” (Ezk. 47:1). This river brought life where it went, and provided fish for the fishermen. It went into the sea, and the sea was healed, and there was “*a place to spread forth nets; their fish shall be according to their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many.*” (V. 10).

The *right side* is the side of healing grace to that beloved nation of Israel—and to we who are Gentiles, also. May we value this day of grace, and be found casting our nets on the right side, for He has called us to be fishers of men. “*And He saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*” (Matt. 4:9). “*Preach the word .. do the work of an evangelist ...*” (2 Tim. 4). Oh! What a message of healing grace we have! *H. Short*

I am daily more convinced that the *study* of the Word is the only sure way to growth and strength. The way to get interested in the Word is to *feel you need its counsel* to guide and succour you. God’s Word is the only thing for faith has to cling to.

Excerpt, Words of Truth, 1868

Meditations of a father

“For though we walk in the flesh we do not war after the flesh.” (2 Cor. 10:3).

How often we find that some days go smoothly while we find that others are *heavy sledding*, so to speak. It make us realize perhaps that we are not just materialistic pieces of flesh moving around in this world. We are also spiritual beings and spiritual conflict is a very real thing, especially in a world where Satan is god and prince. We can never expect to feel completely at home down here. But that will make it so much more vivid for us when we are called home to the Father's House. The moment we set foot on that shore it will be with the fullest measure and sense that this is our *Home*.

But remember—for here and now it is not a matter of physical stamina in battle we engage in as believers, but to going on in the might of His strength. That is why so often believers that are weaker physically do greater feats for God. It is not a matter of what we are, but of what *He* is for us.

“Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long” (Prov. 23:17). “The fear of the Lord shall be your treasure” (Isa. 33:6, J. N. D. Trans.).

The Lord is always right beside us, listening to every word, observing every action and weighing even the hidden motives of the heart. Even though this searches us deeply, still in the end we will find it, as Scripture says, “your treasure.” Oh, the liberty

and blessedness of walking as before Him without anything to hide.

“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”
(Eph. 6:11).

God has full provision as to armour for us in this warfare, but we are responsible to put it on, that is make it truly practical in our lives. There is little value in knowing something, if we do not put it into practice. May God give us grace to reflect and see if we have really put on the armour He has provided.

Remember, (1) the armour should be put on before the battle starts. Thus the importance of making sure it is all in place at any given moment. (2) There is no armour for the back. There is no place in God's thoughts in fleeing from the enemy. We are told to resist him, and he will flee from us.

B. Thonney

Principles and Practice

I do not believe that the Brethren are *the* Church of God; but they are on the *ground* of the Church of God. But as to our *conduct* on that ground, we can only put our faces in the dust. The *position* is divine; but as to our *condition*, we have ever to humble ourselves before our God.

A friend once said to me, “Do you know that the Rev. Mr. — is delivering a course of lectures against the Brethren?”

“Tell him,” I said, “with my kind regards, that I am doing the very same just now. But there is a difference between us. He is lecturing against their *principles*, while I am lecturing against their *practices*. He is attacking the ground; I, the conduct on the ground.”

It is not that I consider the Brethren any worse than their neighbors. But, when I consider the high ground we take, our conduct and character ought to be correspondingly high. This alas! is not the case. Our spiritual tone, both in private life and in our public reunions, is sorrowfully low. There is a sad lack of depth and power in our assemblies. There is excessive feebleness in worship and ministry.

I believe the vast increase in our numbers, within the last twenty years (written in 1874-75), is by no means, an index of an increase of power. No doubt, we have to be thankful for every soul brought into what we believe to be a right position.

But the enemy is ever vigilant, seeking to discredit the ground and dishonour the Lord. In denominations, inconsistencies of individuals are in a measure hidden behind the bulwarks of the system. But Brethren stand fully exposed, and their failures are ever used against them.

The grand point for us all is to be *humble, lowly, dependent* and *watchful*. May we be kept very little in our own eyes, clinging to Christ, confessing His Name, keeping His Word, serving His cause, waiting for His coming!

Adapted, “15 Letters to a Friend”, C. H. Makintosh

Thoughts on Sin

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men,...For if through the offence of one many be dead,...for the judgment was by one;....For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one;...by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; ..by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners,..sin hath reigned unto death.”(Rom.5)

The “one” man in these verses is Adam. He, as the head of the human race, took that race into that condition of manhood under the power and reign of the principle of “sin”. *Sin* is a principle of rule that attached to fallen man. Man is identified with it as “..the body of sin..” (Rom.6:6). “*I am carnal, sold under sin.*” (Rom.7:14). “*But I see another law in my members,..the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*” (Rom.7:24). Sin here is the principle that produces the “fruit” of “sins”. “Sin”, the principle, is condemned (can never be forgiven), but “sins” may be forgiven.

The answer to this condition of sin is *not forgiveness*, it is *death*—that is, the condemnation of “*sin in the flesh*”, not it’s forgiveness. “*God sending His own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.*” (Rom.8:3). “*Sinful flesh*” is what man is, as long as the first man Adam is his source of life.

We need a new “head”, and, praise God, we find Him in Christ Jesus our Lord. “..*The last Adam was*

made a quickening spirit.” (1Cor.15) .Thus, we— mankind— are either “in Christ Jesus” or “in the flesh”. Righteousness and life are the portion of those who are “in Christ Jesus”, sin, death and condemnation the portion of those described as being “.in the flesh.” (Rom.8:9).“Sin”, “sin in the flesh” and “sinful flesh” are not forgiven, they are “condemned”.

H. Smith

This morning we were reading in Micah 7. Verse 10 says, “*Where is the LORD thy God?*” It reminded me of an incident. A Christian man was dying of cancer. His believing wife, understandably, was sorrowing for him. An unbeliever said to her, “Where is your God now?”

In such circumstances, how good to be able to say; “He is right beside me. He is always beside me and will never leave me nor forsake me.” (Heb. 13:5).

How comforting it is to know this; to be assured of it! Many times a dear believer in deep trial has said, “What would I do without Him?”

How good to know that “*The Lord is at hand.*” (Phil 4:5). He was there at Paul’s side in prison, and we hear the beloved apostle saying, “*Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say rejoice.*” (Phil. 4:4).

“*His love in times past forbids us to think He’ll leave us at last in trouble to sink.*” #10 Appx, LF

adapted, T. Roach

One day a young missionary of about twenty two

came to Bolivia. He was a recent graduate of a seminary in a large U.S. city. Entering a humble little dwelling where a few dear believers in the Lord Jesus had gathered, he sat in the very front.

A dear old native brother, who labored for many years in this location, also happened to be there. He was a *tried* servant of Christ. The young man, full of zeal, energy and new ideas, came to him and said, "Why don't you link up with us: we number in the thousands in the States, while you are just tiny groups of the *two's* and *three's* here." But he didn't realize that he was talking to a saint who always had a quick, ready reply.

The aged brother looked at him and said, "Dear brother, I hope you have been born again." Then without waiting for a reply from the surprised young man, he went on. "Tell me, can you have any more of the Lord Jesus with your thousands than we have with the two's and the three's". And he quoted that verse in Matt. 18, "*Where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there am I in the midst of them*".

Brethren, what more could we want? Is there any place so blessed then to know that the Lord Jesus is present in our midst? I know of no other place so blessed as that. *E. Smith*

Give your children a spiritual legacy. "*Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children.*" (Psa. 90:16).

Spiritual Gems for the Path of Faith

Who is this One before whose face earth and heaven flee? (Rev. 20:11).

The same One who fell on his face in the garden of Gethsemane (Mat. 26:39).

The same One in whose face man, in his awful hatred dared to spit (Isaiah 50 :6, Mat. 26 :67).

The same One whose face was marred more than any man's (Isaiah 52:14), but Who is for us fairer than the children of men (Ps. 45 :2).

The same One from Whom God hid His face in His time of deep need (Mat. 27 :46).

The same One we are called to contemplate and in Whose face shines the knowledge of the glory of God (2 Cor. 3 :18, 2 Cor. 4 :6).

The same One whose face we shall soon see (Rev. 22 :3) when we will be face to face with Him (1 Cor. 13 :12).

*“...the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”
Michel Payette*

Answers to October 2000 Bible Challenger

B ill	Luke 16:6
R ain	Deut. 11:17
O ver take them	Josh. 2:5
K ings of the Amorites	1 Sam. 20:19
E zel	1 Chron. 16:23
N o man take thy crown	Rev. 3:11

“(And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him;) and a three fold cord is not quickly **Broken.**”(Ecc. 3:11) *R. Erisman*

Feed the Flock

Lost and Found

During the depression of the 1930's, a Christian man, living in a large city worked as a carpenter, supporting his wife and six children. Though times were, at best, very hard, he had carefully saved up \$20.00 to purchase a much needed pair of glasses.

One Saturday shortly after, he spent the day building and packing wooden crates for a group of Christians who were sending a large supply of clothing to a Christian mission orphanage in China.

Finishing his work he walked several miles home. There he reached into his shirt pocket for the glasses, only to find that they were missing! Carefully rethinking the day, he realized that they must have slipped out of his pocket, into one of the crates, which he had nailed shut. His brand new glasses were now on their way to China!

He told God that it wasn't fair. He had been trying to help the needy. Having no money for another pair, how could any good could come from this trouble. Why had a loving God allowed the trial?

Months later a missionary from that Chinese orphanage came home on furlough. The carpenter and his family went to hear him speak. After thanking everyone for their support he continued, smiling: "But most of all I must thank you for the pair of glasses you sent last year. The Communists had just swept through the orphanage, destroying everything, including my only pair. I was desperate, for I had no money to purchase new glasses, and even if I had,

there was no safe place where I could buy them.

I began having terrible headaches and was unable to do my daily work. We earnestly prayed for the Lord's help. Shortly after, your crates of clothing arrived. As my staff removed the covers, they found in one crate, a pair of glasses lying right on top of the clothing. When I tried them on, I found they were exactly the strength I needed—almost identical to my previous pair which had been destroyed. It was as though they had been made just for me!"

Hearing this, the weeping carpenter bowed his head in thanksgiving to God for His great goodness.

At times, even the greatest of God's servants, have faltered in the path of faith. Abram *went down* to Egypt to escape famine in the land God had promised to give his heirs (Gen. 12:10).

Moses—*mighty in word*—told Jehovah that he was unable to speak well (Ex. 4:10). And Elijah who raised the only son of a widow from the dead, fled in fear from the death threat of wicked Jezebel after he destroyed the prophets of Baal. (1 Kn. 17 & 19).

The disciples—to whom the Lord gave *power over devils* (Luke 9:1)—fear that they will perish in the storm though the Creator of the Universe is peacefully sleeping in the ship with them (Mark 4).

Is it not often so with our hearts? Our blessed God assures us that He is all good—that all works for our good—that by His goodness we are blessed. Yet unbelief convinces us that He doesn't mean what He says. Oh! may we ever remember that "*the goodness of God endureth continually.*" (Psa. 52:1)

Ed.

Practical Reflections

Acts 8:4-19

v 4 “*Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.*”

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

v 5 “*Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.*”

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

v 6 “*And the people with one accord gave heed*

unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.”

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

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

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

v 8 *“And there was great joy in that city.”*

The Old Testament history of the city of Samaria (the capital of the rebellious ten tribes of Israel) is marked by continual sadness, strife, violence and destruction. Nor did it become a happier place after the King of Assyria (2 Kn. 17:6) overran it, carrying Israel (those constituting the ten tribes) away captive. But now, the work of God in Jerusalem marked by *great grace* and *great power* reaches out with *great joy* to the hopeless.

v 9 *“But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery,*

and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one.”

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

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

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

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

The truth of God, the gospel of His grace, produces its effects, not in a display of *great power*, but in a public display of the symbol of *death* (the greatest example of weakness known in this world)

they were *baptized*. The gospel makes nothing of man—everything of Christ, and that through His death at the cross.

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

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

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

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

v 15-17 *“Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord*

Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.”

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

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

V 18, 19 *“And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power; that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.”*

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

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

Ed.

Bible Challenger

The first letter of the following responses will form the *two* words of a moving testimony as to how the Lord kept a onetime spy for 45 years of enduring the rigors of wilderness travel. The number in brackets indicates the number of words in each answer.

1. That which a priest, who kept the door of the house of the Lord, collected in a specially prepared box. (1)
2. The physical parts of our human bodies which a famous king could say, “desired things he kept not from them”. (1)
3. Something a certain man was quick to affirm that he had kept, when he was told the way to enter tin to life was by keeping the commandments. (3)
4. Two unwelcome visitors to a flock, kept by a youth, who relied upon the Lord for deliverance. (4)
5. The place where many countenance changing cogitations of coming events, were kept, in a young man upon hearing the angelic interpretations. (3)
6. A complimentary word, spoken in satire, to a king’s captain after being found asleep had not kept his master, who was the Lord’s anointed. (1)
7. The length of time a certain man of Lydda, who was healed by an apostle, had “kept his bed”. (2)

Answers to these questions will be found, Lord willing, in the next issue of the *Christian Shepherd*.
R. Erisman