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James 5:13-20 Faith seen in Prayer

Joel Portman

Afflicted and Sick—Pray! vs. 13-15

James is nearing the end of his epistle that emphasizes the practical reality and demonstration of faith in a professing believer's life. He began by teaching that faith perseveres in all circumstances of life and in that context, he was emphasizing the activity of prayer (1:5-8). He mentions other positive expressions of faith in the epistle but now he returns to the importance of prayer in a life of faith. Prayer is mentioned in every verse of this chapter's ending, reminding us of the importance of this spiritual activity in our lives. I'm sure that few of us would claim to resemble James in this respect, for it is said that he was so often engaged in prayer that he had "camel knees" since they were so calloused from being in that posture. Other believers of old were known as men and women of prayer; those were days of spiritual power and godly living so that we should look at our limited and shallow prayers to see if they are not the reason for such a lack in our days. Few of us would dare to claim that we pray as we know we should, but James exhorts us to be engaged in this activity as part of our daily lives.

These believers faced varied conditions of life; some caused distress and others resulted in delight. He speaks of "afflicted" saints and exhorts them to pray. This word describes all events that may cause deep distress, even anxiety of heart. It could include persecution, hard conditions, distress, or suffering that can come from many different sources. Heibert says that it can include trouble that is mental, physical, personal, financial, spiritual, or religious. It is misfortune or calamity. Many saints have passed through these times, and

James exhorts them to pray, not to complain. Instead of self-pity, they should cast their burden on the Lord (Psalm 55:22). They may not be delivered from it but they will be sustained in it (2 Corinthians 12:8-9). Prayer recognizes that all events of life are known to the Lord, either directed by His sovereign will or allowed to enter our lives. We see how the attitude of faith turns the attention of the sufferer toward the Lord, Who is able to control, use, or deliver those in such circumstances. These forms of suffering don't indicate that there is sin in the life or that wrong behavior is the cause; this passage doesn't indicate any cause. But the believer who is acting in faith turns his heart to the Lord in prayer.

Equally needed is occupation with the Lord when there is joy and cause for rejoicing. We often enter into those pleasures without considering that they are of the Lord and that He has supplied them. To sing psalms would teach us to recognize Him as the Gracious Giver of all the joys that we have or all that gives joy in life. It's interesting that the only other use of this word is found in Acts 27:22, 25 during the storm that Paul and others experienced. He exhorted them to "be of good cheer", and one might ask how or why anyone would be of good cheer under those conditions. It was, of course, because Paul had received a message through an angel that assured him that no lives would be lost, only the ship and its cargo. This was not, obviously, a state of hilarity or extreme merriment, but a quiet realization that God was over all and would deliver them in His time and way. So believers can do the same and in that assurance, they can sing psalms that express praise to God for His abundant mercies.

But also a Christian might be literally sick and this called for a different reaction. Let me consider this portion in a slightly differently manner than other writers. The scripture should be interpreted in context, and since this was a very early epistle, we know that often God sent sickness as discipline for sin. We witness this particularly in the case of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 and in 1 Corinthians 11:30. That being the case, we need to ask if this believer recognizes that his sickness is because of sin that he has not confessed, so he calls the elders of the local church. He has a matter to bring into the light and confess (v. 16) to them, so that he might be restored spiritually

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and healed physically. F. B. Hole agrees and says, "As to sickness the Apostle's instructions are equally plain. It is viewed as being God's chastening hand upon the saint, very possibly in the form of direct retribution for his sins. In this the church would be interested, and the elders of the church should be called in. They, *at their discretion*, pray over him, anointing him with oil in the Lord's name and he is healed, his sins being governmentally forgiven. It is evident from such a scripture as 1 John 5:16 that the elders were to exercise their spiritual discernment as to whether it was, or was not, the will of God that healing should be granted. If they discerned it to be His will then they could pray the prayer full of faith and confidence, which would be without fail answered in his recovery."

They gladly come (notice that he calls them, not that they are there to interrogate him, but his conscience moves him to do so), and in the process of their time together, the matter is cleared up so they pray over him and also anoint him with oil (olive). Their prayer is for this person's spiritual and physical restoration and in doing so, they are also showing their desire that there be no interruption of fellowship. The anointing seems to be with a refreshing or medicinal value in view. The word used isn't the one normally used for a ritualistic anointing but rather that of healing according to the means that they had at their disposal during that time.

"The prayer of faith" saves the sick, not the anointing. This is usually taken to mean the prayer of the elders who have come, and possibly this is correct. We also note that the word thus translated "prayer" is always translated as "vow" in other passages (Acts 18:18, 21:23). Could this mean that the afflicted person is vowing to God that he will remedy that condition, that he has repented of it and will turn away from it and seek to never be guilty of the same again? Perhaps. But either thought has value; it shows that we need the prayers of others, and it is certainly a great responsibility of the elders of a local assembly to pray for believers, especially when they are in such conditions as this.

Confess Faults—Pray! v. 16

Recognizing and honestly confessing one's faults to others is also a characteristic of genuine faith. It is the opposite of an attitude of pride that refuses to acknowledge wrongs and trespasses. We notice that the New Translation by J.N. Darby says, "Confess therefore your faults..." and this seems to link with and

follow on with the previous instruction. It also seems to substantiate the interpretation that the sick one calling for the elders is because of realized sin to confess. In view of that possibility, James says, we should seek to maintain open, honest relations with other believers to prevent falling into greater sin. Others may differ from this interpretation, but it seems to fit the context of this passage.

This is a different word from the previous verse, not “sins” but “faults,” or errors. It’s the same word that Paul uses in Galatians 6:1, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault...”. It is a blunder, a mistake that one has made. It’s not the same word as in v. 20, “err”, but carries a similar thought. James has said in 3:2 that we all offend with our language and we must honestly confess that to be true. Here is where we are most prone to fail and lose control, so there would be many opportunities that call for confession to other believers. This isn’t a public “confession meeting” but it is rather the honesty toward another believer that causes us to freely acknowledge when we have gone wrong. If that condition existed among us, there would be more reasons to pray for one another. We are more apt to criticize and expose another’s failures when instead, we should seek to pray for their preservation and restoration as the case may require. This kind of openness with others would also foster fellowship and strengthen our relationships with other believers.

Knowing the results of the prayer of a righteous man would, in turn, encourage such mutual confession. Prayer, in this case, isn’t the word for general prayers but for petitions. This would be the exercised response of a righteous believer in prayer as petition is expressed to God for the other believer. James is assuming that there will be those among believers who would be truly (1) righteous in practical living, not only positionally, and (2) able to truly make such petitions on behalf of another. This would be the desirable condition to see among believers, and we should make it our aim in life to be in such a condition so that we can be a blessing to other Christians.

Times of Great Need—Pray! vs. 17-18

James reminds us of Elijah, a man who was like us in temperament and makeup with all its possible faults and failures that God faithfully records. He was no extraordinary man, but he was a man who knew the power of prayer and exercised himself in that activity. In like manner, he faithfully served God during a period of apostasy and opposition to the truth with all its difficulties that were imposed on him. With a deep longing for the restoration of true worship in Israel, he

prayed that it would not rain (1 Kings 17:1). That aspect of his prayer life isn’t recorded for us, only the resulting confidence that he had when he went to declare to Ahab that it would not rain until Elijah gave the word. What confidence his praying had! Few of us would be bold enough to make such a statement to one like Ahab, but Elijah had that power because he stood in the presence of God (1 Kings 17:1). If we were more consciously in God’s presence, then we would have similar confidence and assurance of what God was going to do. Elijah’s prayer, also, was in the light of the promised judgment of God if His people were unfaithful to Him, so that Elijah could act as God’s messenger of such predicted judgment (Deuteronomy 11:17, 28:23). He had confidence in God and in God’s Word, that He would do as He had said.

He could pray for God to work judgmentally but he also prayed (1 Kings 18) for renewed blessing. Both prayers were according to God’s Word and expressed his close relationship with God. James uses these two examples of the earnest prayer of a righteous man to show how much it can accomplish and to encourage his readers to be occupied in the same way.

Others Straying—Restore, vs 19-20

Some feel that the last verses of this epistle have no connection with the previous teaching, but it does seem that James is following on with the subject of practical faith and its expression, especially as seen in Elijah and his prayers. He was exercised to see Israel restored to God and this is what James is also teaching us. We cannot be indifferent to a brother straying, or erring, from the truth without failing to show the compassion and exercise that genuine faith produces. We remember the words of our blessed Lord to Peter in Luke 22:31-32, when He anticipated Peter’s denial under Satan’s influence. He could speak with assurance that Peter would be turned back and restored (converted) and that he should, as a result, also seek to strengthen his brothers. This erring from the truth may be apostasy which could be more easily corrected at its beginning than when it becomes more advanced and deep-seated in the other. Saying “any among you” is usually taken to define a genuine believer but it may also mean that it is a person who is now associated with the believers and has embraced the truth but without ever truly becoming a believer. It’s too easy to deny responsibility for a person like that and to let them go astray and thus never be truly saved. But James says that one, a “sinner”, should be

brought back from his error if possible. This is similar to Jude's language in Jude 22-23. The language that he uses seems to indicate that this may be his meaning. To see this person as a genuine Christian is to suggest that it is possible to lose one's salvation and be lost. Death, if a genuine believer, would be physical, and this was evidently more common in the early period of the church, as we have noticed. If this is not a true believer, then it could also include eternal death because of their deviation from the truth if it continued.

This epistle should encourage us to act faithfully and consistently in our testimony as we seek to manifest to others that faith is real in a genuine Christian, and that is it operative and effective in its testimony and ability to maintain the stability of life and character. James closes without any final salutation to his readers, so we sense that he is giving teaching that applied to all believers, wherever they might be found, and this would include us in our day. May we receive and apply it for our edification.

The joy of the Christian floats not on the surface, but dwells deep in the recesses of the heart, making holidays there. If Christians do not rejoice it is because they do not live up to their privileges.

An Effectual Fervent Prayer

John Peters (Surrey)

(AT May/June 1980)

(Readings: 2 Chronicles 14; James 5:13-20)

The writer of 1 and 2 Chronicles pursues two themes in particular: true kingship and true worship. Prayer is, of course, a vital part of a believer's worship expressing, as it does, the "Soul's sincere desire" the "motion of a hidden fire" that "runs within the breast". It has also been said that "praying is working". All these comments apply to Asa's prayer recorded in 2 Chronicles 14, which is sufficiently brief to be quoted in full: "And Asa cried unto the Lord his God, and said, 'LORD, it is nothing with thee to help,

whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O LORD, thou art our God, let not man prevail against thee.'"

In order to appreciate this prayer fully and properly, we can note its:

Context

Asa had succeeded his father, Abijah, as king of Judah, and he began his reign auspiciously by doing that which was "good and right in the eyes of the Lord" (2 Chronicles 14:2). He took away "the altars of the strange gods" (v. 3), and under him the land enjoyed peace and doubtless the prosperity that accompanied it (v. 7). Eventually however his army of under 600,000 had to face the might of Zerah's army of a million troops, and before Asa went out to do battle against such over-whelming numbers, he prayed the prayer found in verse 11 of 2 Chronicles 14.

Characteristics

Asa's prayer had four outstanding features. In the first place it was heart-felt -- 'He cried'. Asa was in earnest about the situation that confronted him. Like Nehemiah who had similarly faced appalling problems (Nehemiah 2:4), he prayed fervently and with sincerity. Secondly, it was Personal: 'To God'. Asa perceived that Israel's future was inextricably linked to God's divine will and so he sought His aid. He realized and confessed his great need in an attitude of utter dependence upon God and in a truly humble way. Then, it was Specific -- 'Help us'. Help was precisely what Asa needed at that hour of crisis. Assistance for him was soon available. For us too there is the promise of divine aid, for 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble' (Psalm 46:1). Fourthly, it was Believing: 'We rest on Thee'. This of course had ever been the secret of Israel's success, as another verse, also from 2 Chronicles makes explicit: "And the children of Israel prevailed, because they relied upon the LORD God of their fathers" (chapter 13:18). This sort of God-given confidence has enabled the saints through the ages to face the sternest of tests and conflicts with equanimity and resolve, and part of this prayer is of course enshrined in the well-known hymn:

We rest on Thee, our Shield and our Defender,
We go not forth alone against the foe.
Strong in Thy Strength, safe in Thy keeping tender,
We rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go.

Yea, in Thy name, O Captain of Salvation,
 In Thy blest name, all other names above,
 Jesus our Righteousness, our sure Foundation,
 Our Prince of Glory, and our King of Love.

We go in faith, our own great weakness feeling,
 And needing more each day Thy grace to know,
 Yet from our hearts a song of triumph pealing,
 "We rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go."

We rest on Thee, our Shield and our Defender,
 Thine is the battle, Thine shall be the praise
 When passing through the gates of pearly
 splendor,
 Victors, we rest with Thee, through endless days.
 (Edith Cherry, 1872-1897)

How eloquently such divine confidence and courage was demonstrated by the five American missionaries—Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, Ed McCully, Roger Youderian and Pete Fleming—who sought to take the Gospel story to the Auca Indians of Ecuador. On Sunday, 8th January, 1956, having set up a base next to the Curaray river, Nate Saint radioed this message to the missionary wives— "Have just sighted a commission of ten, it looks like they'll be here for the early afternoon service. Pray for us. This is the day. Will contact you next at four-thirty!" After lunch the missionaries sang the hymn referred to above, then waited for the Aucas to arrive. But, in Elisabeth Elliot's graphic words, "Before four-thirty that afternoon the quiet waters of the Curaray flowed over the bodies of the five comrades, slain by the men they had come to win for Christ, whose banner they had borne". These men, like Asa, knew what it was to rely for their strength absolutely on God, and like Asa too they knew a great deal of the power and solace of prayer.

Consequences

Asa's prayer was answered in a striking and remarkable way: "So the Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled". Prayer does indeed change things. Prayer is part of our "waiting on the Lord" and, as we know from Isaiah 40:31, "they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint".

Lord, teach us how to pray a-right,
 With reverence and with fear,
 Though dust and ashes in thy sight,
 We may, we must, draw near.

**Saints are not so much afraid of suffering
 as they are of sinning; in suffering the
 offense is done to us, but in sinning
 the offense is done to God.**

The Observance of the Lord's Day

Andrew Borland

As the sabbath was instituted to celebrate the old Creation, so the Lord's day celebrates the New Creation. Throughout this age the most Spirit-filled, devout believers to whom the will of God has been clearly revealed, have observed the Lord's day apart from any sense of responsibility to keep the seventh day. It is reasonable to suppose that had they truly been guilty of sabbath breaking, the Spirit would have convicted them of that sin.

Since it is all of grace, a written requirement for the keeping of the Lord's day is not imposed, nor is the manner of its observance prescribed. By this wise provision, none are encouraged to keep the day as a mere duty; but rather, it is to be kept from the heart. Israel stood before God as immature children under tutors and governors and needing the commandments which are given to a child (Galatians 4:1-11); while the Church stands before God as adult sons. Their life under grace is clearly defined, but it is presented only as the beseechings of God with the expectation that all shall be done willingly (Ephesians 4:1-3; Romans 12:1-2). There is little question as to how a well-instructed, Spirit-filled believer (and the Scripture presupposes a normal Christian to be such) will be occupied on the day which commemorates Christ's resurrection and the New Creation. If perchance the child of God is not yielded to God, no unwilling observance of a day will correct his carnal heart nor would such observance be pleasing to God. The issue between God and the carnal Christian is not one of outward actions, but of a

yielded life.

The observance of the first day is indicated by various events. In addition to the fact that the sabbath is nowhere imposed on the children of God under grace, there are reasons for their observance of the first day of the week.

1. On that day Christ arose from the dead (Matthew 28:1-7; Luke 24:1-6).

2. On that day He first met His disciples in the new fellowship (John 20:19).

3. On that day the Spirit descended from Heaven (Acts 2:1-4).

4. On that day the Apostle Paul preached in Troas (Acts 20:6,7)

5. On that day the believers came together to break bread (Acts 20:6,7)

6. On that day they were to "lay by in store" as God had prospered them (1 Corinthians 16:2).

7. On that day Christ appeared to John on Patmos (Revelation 1:10). (Lewis Sperry Chafer)

"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight" (Acts 20:7).

This is evidently something to which the Holy Spirit desires to draw our attention in a special way; otherwise it would not be mentioned so definitely. They arrived in Troas, and remained there seven days until the first day of the week rolled around. And what is the first day of the week? It's the day that we call Sunday. And on this day, not on the Jewish Sabbath, but on the first day of the week, already it had apparently become customary apparently for the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ to gather together for a specific purpose, and that purpose is called here "to break bread". (Harry Ironside)

In 1825, J. G. Bellett, who had met Anthony Norris Groves in Dublin, wrote these memorable words of his friend: "It appeared to him from Scripture that believers, meeting together as disciples of Christ, were free to break bread as their Lord had admonished them, and that in so far as the practice of the apostles could be a guide, every Lord's Day should be set apart for thus remembering the Lord's death and obeying His parting command." To those who are accustomed now to meet in that simple, unpretentious way, such a discovery means nothing, but to men who were wedded to dead church systems it was momentous, captivating. This reversion to the Scriptures (noted early in the 19th century) has had repercussions in the furthest corners of the world. Gatherings for the breaking of bread are now an

integral part of that witness which derives its virility from its simplicity. The oneness of the Body of Christ is recognized and the opportunity to display such oneness is given in the weekly gathering to break bread.

**Pride sets a man in opposition against God.
Other sins are aversions from God, but this sin
is a coming against God. In other sins a man flies
from God, but in this sin a man flies upon God.
God resisteth the proud.**

The Preacher And His Message

E. W. Rogers

The preacher whom God has used in blessing to others is the one to teach us those principles which God approves. Not all who are outwardly successful can do this, but the apostle Paul can. In his letter to the Colossians he writes, "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ; Whereunto I also labor, striving according to His working which worketh in me mightily" (Colossians 1:28-29). In these verses Paul states four things as to his preaching: its subject, method, purpose, and power. Let us consider these in this order.

The Subject

The subject of the apostle's preaching was Christ, "Whom we preach." The pronoun "Whom" should be noted for it relates to "Christ in you the hope of glory," as seen by the preceding verse. Paul did not preach things, he preached a person, Christ. To him Christ was "all in all" (Colossians 3:11). In his estimate Christ excelled all others. The Colossians were apt to be drawn away from the Lord, and to entertain an undue reverence for angels and other spiritual powers, but Paul preached Christ, not angels. He calls Him "the Son of God's love," "the image of the invisible God." To the apostle, Christ was Designer, Maker, Upholder, and Heir of the visible and invisible creations, as well as the "Head of the body, the Church." What else was worth preaching in view of such a theme?

Paul did not preach himself, for he says, "We preach not ourselves." Notable conversion as he had,

that was not the chief item of his preaching, for he only used it to illustrate the power of the gospel. In many of his letters he alluded to what he was and what a difference the grace of God had made. He tells the Corinthians he was not worthy to be called an apostle seeing he had done what no other apostle had ever done; he had "persecuted the Church of God." He tells the Galatians the same, and to the Romans he recounts his experiences and inward struggles before his spiritual deliverance. To the Philippians he speaks of his zeal for the law and shows to what it led him; it made him hostile to Christ. He tells Timothy he was once a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man. All this was secondary and only with the view of magnifying the Savior. He did not preach himself; he merely mentioned himself to enhance the glory of his Lord. "We preach Christ crucified."

This principle should ever be borne in mind by preachers today. Beware of directing the eyes and ears of your hearers to yourselves. Turn them to the Lord by making Him the center of every gospel message.

Some failed to do this in Paul's day, and some fail to do it today. That is why he used the emphatic pronoun "we", for both Paul and Timothy were one in this. The preacher of the book of Ecclesiastes disappoints all who read his sermon. It is with great relief that we turn from such a sermon to the Canticles (Song of Solomon) to learn of the Altogether Lovely One (5:10), the Chiefest of Ten Thousand (5:16), the One Whom the bride calls "My Friend." (5:16). The speaker is wholly occupied with the beauties of her Beloved, so she cries, "Look not upon me." Why should sinners look upon us? We have no innate power, nor can we supply the soul's need; therefore, we must preach Christ.

The Method

Note the words used by Paul in our verse, "preach", "warning", and "teaching." The first has to do with the public proclamation of the gospel, but the latter two have to do with individual work. Paul tells the Ephesian elders that he preached publicly and from house to house. He knew well enough that public work had not only its uses but also its limitations. It must be followed by personal work, for the market square and also the private house should each be visited. The preacher ought to be like his Lord, Who oftentimes preached to crowds by the seaside but as frequently spoke to individuals in their need. Nicodemus and the woman of Samaria are examples of this particular ministry of Christ.

Paul varied his methods. He was not always harping on one string. He was an announcer of facts concerning Christ, and informed the public of things they did not know. He followed his preaching with admonishments and warnings. He urged that Christ should be trusted and he also warned of the consequences involved if He were rejected. He also taught the believers, and instructed those recently brought to the Lord. There is progress in these words; preaching is the first step, followed by warning against rejecting the message, and in turn, this is supplemented by teaching the converts. Paul thus showed wisdom in the manner in which he acted; some others, it is feared, show a lack of wisdom. We should be like Jude, prepared to switch from an intended message to another if we discover our theme unsuitable for our audience. In this we must be flexible and spiritually intelligent, even intuitive, and able to appraise people in order to assess both their needs and their capacities, and to speak as they are able to bear. Please notice the repeated use of "every". Paul was both thorough and impartial. To him all were alike in need of Christ, no matter what other differences they might have. He knew God had looked on the heart of man and had said that all had strayed. Every man, Jew and Gentile, came within the parish of Paul. Therefore he devoted his energies, not only to the obvious derelict, but to all, without showing favor to any. God has no favorites. Let us then follow this method for it cannot be improved.

The Purpose

Paul's aim was to present "every man full-grown in Christ." The word "perfect" perhaps conveys the wrong idea in modern English. Paul knew that perfection will be attained only when we go to be with the Lord. He himself already had written to the saints concerning the conflict of the two natures within the believer. That conflict will not cease as long as we are in the body. His idea in this verse is that of full growth; he did not desire the converts to remain in perpetual infancy. If immaturity in the things of nature is very grievous, how much more so in the things of the spirit. The sincere milk of the Word is God's provided means of growth. We should encourage converts to feed on it (1 Peter 2:2). Carnality and babyhood are twins, for the presence of the one proves a person to be in the other. The Hebrew believers had gone back, and although they should have been able to teach, they still needed to be taught. In view of the long time they had been in Christ, they should have been able to digest strong meat, instead they still needed to be fed

with milk. Their growth was retarded. We cannot stand still nor mark time; we either go backward or we go forward.

Paul's eyes were ever on the future. The Judgment Seat lay ahead, and he wanted to present his converts there fully grown in Christ. This could only be accomplished as he diligently warned and taught them. Paul could not be content if it were otherwise. None less than "every man" must be presented to the Lord. None less would do for Paul, and none less should do for us. In this Paul was one with God. God Himself supplies the needs of the body, the Church, through Christ. He furnishes a constant flow of ministry through His appointed servants in order that "We all come to... a full, grown man." Read Ephesians 4:7-16, and notice the contrast drawn between the babe and the full grown man.

This particular passage in Ephesians should be placed along-side Colossians 1:28, for while the former shows that God has taken the proper measures to insure the ultimate good being reached, a perfect man, that being, corporately, the Church completely developed, the latter passage shows that the apostle in harmony with the mind of God takes similar measures in his ministry to attain the same end in the case of each individual. It is to be feared that in this we also fail. We are happy to get converts but what steps do we take to instruct or admonish them? Do we give them adequate and appropriate food for the development of the life so recently received? Are they rescued from death, but left on the river's bank to the mercy of any destructive element that may arise, or the evil intention of a passing kidnapper?

Such is the sad result of an ill-balanced ministry. It is likely to hinder all the initial work. Is it not our shame if we allow these young converts to starve? Should we not desire to see them able to walk, and more, to walk in those ways which be in Christ? How can this otherwise be if we do not teach them? The making of disciples and teaching are the two things which the Lord joined together in His farewell commission. No one should put them asunder.

The Power

This is no easy work, for it entails labor. Please notice this word, it is stronger than work. It is even more than hard work; it is an exacting effort. Enemies have to be withstood, oppositions of men have to be resisted. Who is sufficient for these things? Paul's sufficiency, as is ours, was of God who enabled him. He labored according to the working of Him who wrought in him in power. The secret was, "Christ in him." Paul could do

all things through Christ Who strengthened him. Through Him he became a competent minister of the new covenant, an effective worker among saints and sinners. This was not through his own power or wisdom. It was the Lord operating in him.

If God is pleased to grant us spiritual children we should care for them. They will be "our glory and crown" at the Judgment Seat of Christ. What if we, through neglect, retard their development, shall we not then be ashamed before Him because of our own failure (1 John 2:28)?

It is no easy matter to give birth to spiritual children, much less is it easy again to travail in birth till Christ be formed once more in them. It is no sinecure to tend and to train them, and to nourish them in the word of faith, for it requires more strength than we have naturally or mentally, but Paul's God is our God, and His resources are open to us today.

The secret of a peaceful life is not only submission to, but delight in the will of God.

Elders, A Vital Need

O. B. Wyllie

("Wholesome Words for Spiritual Guidance, Issue 71)

The service of Paul and Barnabas in Pisidia and Southern Galatia during their first missionary journey fulfilled the commission given the apostles by the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:18-20. They made disciples (Acts 14:21, R.V.), they baptized them (Gal. 3:26), and so taught them that they were formed into churches according to the pattern now set out in the New Testament Scriptures. Returning to the scenes of these labors, they gave further instruction, and with apostolic discernment and authority saw to it that there were recognized elders in each of the young assemblies (Acts 14:22-23).

Near the end of his labors, and on the occasion of his last visit to Ephesus, Paul witnessed the partial fulfillment of his earlier prophecy recorded in Acts 20:29-30 by disorders having arisen in the assembly. The maintenance of a corporate testimony according to the purpose of God demanded that these be corrected. He himself had need to press on into Macedonia; but he left Timothy in the Asian capital charged with a responsibility in relation to these matters. An important part of that responsibility was to have bishops, or overseers, recognized by the assembly as able to "take care of the church of God."

(1 Timothy 3:1-7). The sphere of their “care” was, of course, the church of God at Ephesus, so named also in Acts 20:28 and in 1 Timothy 3:15.

During the same period of Paul’s ministry a visit to Crete revealed “things that were wanting” in the churches that had been formed in each city; and in this case Titus was deputed to set those things in order. Again, an important step toward this was that he “appoint elders in every city.” (Titus 1:5, R.V.).

Elders were evidently to be found in the various companies of sojourners to whom Peter addressed his First Epistle. Upon them lay the responsibility of feeding the flock of God, as mutually upon the younger the need to be subject to them, accepting their leadership as shepherds (1 Peter 5:1-6).

These various references point to the fact that elders fulfilling their God-assigned service were essential to the functioning of New Testament churches. Godly teachers of the period of the 1848 division among assemblies due to the strife between J. N. Darby and others and even since then, to whom we of the present day owe a tremendous debt, took a firm stand in relation to this subject, cogently affirming, “No elders, then no assemblies.” This was their answer to a form of doctrine then developing among those who “went out from us.” (1 John 2:19). Its foundation was the familiar statement, “The church of God is in ruins”—an erroneous use of the expression, “church of God,” since in Scripture it is always used of a local assembly, and never in the universal sense. In the ruins, it was claimed, apostles no longer existed, and since elders were appointed either by apostles themselves or by men authorized by them, as in the case of Timothy and Titus, there could be no elders now.

Both apostles and prophets belong to the church foundations (Ephesians 2:20), and it was no “ruin” that excluded them from a place in later church testimony. An essential qualification for apostleship was to have seen the Lord Jesus Christ after His resurrection (1 Corinthians 9:1). So, the existence of apostles today is an impossibility. Their ministry and that of the prophets was based on revelation given them as necessity required it. Any claim therefore to apostolic or prophetic ministry among us today is also a claim that God is continuing to give forth revelation, and is a denial of the completeness of the revelation already given us in the Scriptures of Truth.

The Bible as we have it is the embodiment of all revelation that God has given, whether in the past age as contained in the Old Testament, or in this Age of Grace as is now contained in the New. If we are shut

up to this inspired volume for the understanding of God’s will in relation to assembly life, as to all aspects of life—and we surely are— then the need of elders in present-day assemblies is clear. Equally clear is the teaching as to divine provision of them, and guidance as to how they may be recognized by their godly walk and spiritual service.

It is unthinkable that God would show that elders are essential so that His assemblies might function scripturally, and then cease to provide them; or having provided them, to leave His people without guidance as to how they may be known among them. In other words, we are not left in doubt as to whether it is possible for assemblies after the New Testament pattern to exist today. Spirit-taught saints will aim at nothing short of assembly life that answers fully to that pattern.

Rapture

“I will come again” (John 14:3)

Larry Steers, Toronto, CA

In previous editions of “Truths For Our Day” we have worshiped with thanksgiving because “great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16). We have dwelt on the wonder of the virgin birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, His deity, His reconciling death providing salvation through the shedding of His precious blood, and the glory of His resurrection.

Our meditation will now dwell on the monumental moment of His coming when we shall see His face, be like Him, and with Him (1 John 3:2). Every redeemed soul will rise from this earth to meet Him in the air. What a glorious summons awaits us!

Today believers should be filled with great anticipation waiting for the Lord to fulfill His word “I will come again” (John 14:3). When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians they lacked understanding of the truth presented in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. They did not have the complete Word of God as it is our privilege to hold in our hands, to read, and to worship.

The world in which we temporarily sojourn has no anchor for the soul. The vast majority are ignorant of events which lie ahead of them as they drift on to a never ending eternity. Leaders of nations attempt to solve perplexing issues which press in upon them, but have no power or resources to find solutions. Left to

their own faulty schemes they rush on to face an angry God.

In the midst of such uncertain times the scriptures would encourage us. "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil" (Hebrews 6:19).

There are two phases as to our Lord's return. His promise will be perfectly fulfilled. "I will come again, and receive you unto myself" (John 14:3). He will descend from heaven to the air above the earth with a mighty shout. Note that the Apostle Paul anticipated this event occurring in his life time. Writing to the Thessalonians on the grand subject of the Lord's return he wrote, "We which are alive" (1 Thessalonians 4:15). The "we" is significant for the Apostle included himself amongst those who would be dwelling on earth at the moment of the Lord's return. From Paul's day until this present moment all believers should live in anticipation of meeting the Lord in the air. Paul was not looking for signs of the Lord's return. James reminds us, "Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (James 5:8).

I am waiting for the coming
Of the Lord who died for me;
O His words have thrilled my spirit,
"I will come again for thee."
I can almost hear His footfall
On the threshold of the door,
And my heart, my heart is longing
To be with Him evermore.
(Trevor Francis)

The second momentous moment will be when our Lord returns in triumph to this earth. Those left behind at the rapture will see terrifying signs. Many of them are revealed in Matthew 24.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, the Holy Spirit, through the pen of Paul touches both aspects of our Lord's return. The Thessalonians, at the moment of Paul's writing were unknowing relative to the rapture. Likely, because of persecution, some of their numbers were buried in the grave yard of the city. The word, "sleep" is used to refer to their death.

Sleep embraces a beautiful concept when referred to the death of a believer. Stephen, being stoned, fell asleep (Acts 7:60). Lazarus, lying in the tomb "sleepeth" (John 11:11), David "fell asleep" (Acts 13:36). It should be clearly understood that only the body of the believer sleeps, never the soul. Even the soul of an unconverted person, at death is consciously aware of where they are. How solemnly serious in Luke

16 that, while the body of the rich man was buried someplace on earth, his soul was in hell suffering indescribably. Lazarus died. Very likely unceremoniously his body was disposed of, but his soul was "absent from the body and ...present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). Mr. Kelly translates 1 Thessalonians 4:14 "Put to sleep through Jesus". Precious thought that Stephen being stoned, James facing the sword, even today Saints facing disease and death are put to sleep by the Lord.

Sleep is restful, peaceful, but only temporary. There is ahead a moment of waking. The Thessalonians were not aware when, and how, sleeping saints would be awakened. They felt that when the Lord returned to earth as the victorious conqueror, those in the graves would miss the wonder of that moment.

Directed by the Spirit of God, Paul now reminds his readers of two great truths and introduces a third in 1 Thessalonians 4:14. First "If we believe that Jesus died". Or better "if" is translated "since". Second the saints sleep but Jesus died, which may be a reminder of the violent character of the death of Jesus. But He rose again. Death hath no sting and the grave no victory. He entered the realm of death, and exited victorious.

Thirdly, the Thessalonians will be enlightened to a truth that had not been revealed to them. Because of the greatness of the revelation about to be unfolded, Paul would give his authority. It was not the writers of the Synoptic Gospels, nor does he appeal to John. His authority is a direct revelation he had received from the Lord. In verse 14 the Lord is returning to earth, and sleeping Saints are coming with Him.

Before He comes with His Saints (v.14) he will come for His Saints (v. 15). "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout" (v.16).

Our Lord has longed for this blessed moment. During His brief sojourn on earth "Jesus was called, and His disciples to the marriage" (John 2:2) in Cana of Galilee. As He watched a couple united in marriage the thought must have flowed through His soul, "I too will have a bride". He waits in heaven for the fulfillment of this moment.

He will arise from the heavenly throne 'for the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout' (1 Thessalonians 4 :16), a voice of command. John is on the Isle of Patmos. He is a representative of the saints of this dispensation, which is illustrated by the Seven Churches of Asia. Revelation 4:1 represents the end of the day of grace. John is looking up and a command from heaven reaches his ears, "Come up hither" (Revelation 4:). This could be rendered by

“ascend” which is the word “anabaino”. The significance may be expressed by the words of Solomon in Song 2;10 “rise up my Love, my fair one and come away”.

“The dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). They will have priority. The graves of believing Thessalonians who have experienced corruption will be emptied for “this corruptible shall have put on incorruption” (1 Corinthians 15:54). The words “shall not prevent” (1 Thessalonians 4:15) have the significance of “go before”. The span of time infinitely small, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Corinthians 15:52), but sleeping saints, the martyrs of the ages will go first.

“Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them” (1 Thessalonians 4:17) and “we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51). Earthly bodies instantly changed and suitable for heaven.

This moment of meeting for which our Lord has been waiting with anticipation will be veiled from the eyes of sinners left on earth by literal clouds. When Joseph was about to reveal himself to his brothers he cried “cause every man to go out from me” (Genesis 45:1). The Egyptians could never fathom the emotion when Joseph looked into the eyes of each of them with the words “I am Joseph” (Genesis 45:3). That greatly anticipated moment which should literally flood the hearts of saints would be incomprehensible to ungodly earth.

How can we find words to describe that moment when we “shall see His face” (Revelation 22:4) and be forever with Him. The beauty, the glory, of the Saviour will be our uninterrupted eternal contemplation when:

The heavens shall glow with splendour;
 But brighter far than they
 The Saints shall shine in glory,
 As Christ shall them array:
 The beauty of the Saviour
 Shall dazzle every eye
 In the crowning day that's coming
 By and by.
 (D.H.Whittle)

Sleeping and living saints shall be caught up together “to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:18). The air is Satan's realm for he is “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). He is the inveterate enemy of the Lord. The greatest battle ever fought was not on the battlefields of men. It was fought

between Satan and a crucified man on a Roman cross. The Lord's triumphant cry “finished” has reverberated down through the ages and has meant salvation to myriads. But it was also the victors triumphant cry. The battle has been fought, and the Lord has triumphed over Satan and the powers of darkness.

Satan must now view the results of his ignominious defeat in his own realm. He must see the myriads of souls that will worship forever with their Savior. Souls he will not keep enslaved in the Lake of Fire.

“Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:18)

SOUL, REDEEM'D BY LOVE DIVINE

**SOUL, REDEEM'D BY LOVE DIVINE,
 KNOWEST THOU THAT THOU ART MINE?
 HAST THOU YIELDED UTTERLY
 ALL THOU HAST AND ART TO ME?**

**ONCE THY HEART WAS DARK AND COLD,
 'NEATH TRANSGRESSIONS MANIFOLD;
 ONCE THOU DID'ST NOT LOVE ME, YET
 "I FORGAVE THEE ALL THAT DEBT."**

**YEA, I BOUGHT THEE WITH MY BLOOD,
 AND I LED THEE HOME TO GOD;
 LOVED THEE, LOOS'D THEE, SET THEE FREE
 BY MY DEATH ON CALVARY.**

**ROSE TO CLAIM AT GOD'S RIGHT HAND
 ROOM FOR ALL MY RANSOMED BAND;
 THOUGH FOR THEE IS ALL MY HEAVEN,
 ALL TO ME THOU HAST NOT GIVEN.**

**CHILD! REDEEMED BY LOVE DIVINE,
 WILT THOU NOT BE WHOLLY MINE?
 YIELD, OH YIELD THEE UTTERLY
 NOW, AND EVERMORE TO ME!**

Edith Cherry, 1872-1897