

Written for Our Learning

by Charles W. Wages

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”

—Romans 15:4



Grace Bible Church

Speaking the Truth in Love

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Foreword

The reading and studying of God’s Word should be a lifetime experience. No book or booklet can take the place of personal study of The Book. Volumes of systematic theology or Hebrew or Greek lexicons are not sufficient in themselves to take the place of God’s Word, “rightly divided.” II Timothy 2:15 states:

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

The lessons in this book are not exhaustive by any means, but will definitely help in the understanding of the basic truths discussed. Also, it is hoped they will answer some questions often asked, and, above all, encourage a further desire to explore the wonderful Word of God.

— Charles W. Wages

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INTRODUCTION

We know that the Lord Jesus Christ is the living Word (John 1:1-3 & 14). Then what is the purpose of the written Word? Basically, of course, it is God's method of communicating to His creation—man. However, it is much more. We take for granted that we must be in touch with our loved ones; therefore, we write letters, send telegrams, or in some manner “reach out and touch someone.” The written Word is God's way of making His will known. It reveals His divine plan for the ages. It tells of His great love for sinners. It is divine history of how God has worked in the affairs of men and governments. It tells of the past and gives us a foreview of the future. It is spiritual yet practical in instructing us how to live and love. It is more, much more. It is **GOD'S WORD**. Possibly, the most definite portion that tells of the purpose of God's Word is II Timothy 3:16-17:

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”

The important verse of Scripture that shows our responsibility to the Word is II Timothy 2:15:

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of Truth.”

In the forthcoming lessons the truths conveyed in these verses will be followed in setting forth scriptural truths that are believed and firmly held. It is not intended that a “creed” or even a “statement of faith” will be established from our studies, but rather a forthright and concise presentation of Biblical truths that are necessary for growth and hope.

THE FAITH THAT SAVES

“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.” (I Corinthians 10:11)

In the world system in which we live it is commonly spoken of as having three major faiths: Protestant, Catholic and Jewish. Of course, there are numerous other “faiths” that people proclaim, or hold to in their religious beliefs. This type of classification, of course, is unknown in Biblical Truth. These designations have come about through man’s study of church history or religion as it has developed across the years; however, we are going to see that as far as the Bible is concerned, for this age, God only recognizes one faith. In this presentation of Bible Truth, the definition of this one Faith will be presented.

Source of Faith

For faith to be “saving faith” it must be that which comes from God because only God can save a sinner from his or her sin. In Galatians 2:20, it is stated:

“I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

We notice that this is “the faith of (or in) the Son of God.” The good news we believe for salvation is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Corinthians 15:3-4). Since this faith is that which the Lord Jesus worked out, there can be no salvation or victorious living apart from Him and His work. M. R. Vincent in *Word Studies in the New Testament*, states that “this ‘faith’ is the element in which the new life is lived.”

Securing of Faith

The Bible surely teaches that a person must believe and appropriate the work of Christ in order to obtain or secure “the faith that saves.” The word “believe” and its derivatives are numerous, especially in the gospel of John. Belief is simply having faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. *The Companion Bible* in its Appendix 150, shows that the noun Pistis (GR) occurs 242 times in the N.T. and is translated “faith” in almost every instance. This faith or belief implies “the living, Divinely implanted principle.” When the verse in Acts 16:31 states, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house,” it is saying in essence, have faith in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and God will save you on the basis of the finished work of Christ in redemption.

Living Faith

This faith could be defined as “trust” or a willingness of the saved person to throw themselves upon the strength of God in order to overcome daily. The object of our faith must always be the Lord Jesus Christ, whether we are talking about saving faith, securing faith, or living faith. Living faith comes from the heart and mind of the believer and is directed upward to God, whereas saving faith comes from God and is directed downward to the sinner. A very fine Scripture that shows this very clearly is Colossians 2:6-7:

“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him; Rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.”

Abraham of old, really exhibited faith or trust, but he did so because of his firm belief that God could raise his son up (Hebrews 11:17-19). We might not always “see” God work, but, He does! Abraham didn’t “see” all of God’s promises fulfilled in his day, but he trusted God to carry them out in His own way and time. We are told of Abraham in Romans 4:20-21:

“He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. And being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able to perform.”

Abraham showed real faith or trust in God. A remarkable faith! We, as believers today are not Abrahams, but it is very pleasing to God for each of us to trust Him and His Word as well as love Him.

Additional Scriptures:

Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 4:5; Ephesians 2:8-9; Colossians 2:6-7
Romans 4:20-21; Romans 10:17; Romans 3:23-26; Hebrews 11:6

SANCTIFICATION THAT IS SCRIPTURAL

It is easier to define sanctification than to try and describe a sanctified person. Also, we must distinguish between God's elective grace in sanctifying and man's responsibility in living a "holy" life.

The word sanctify is also designated as saints and holy ones, when speaking of persons, and as hallowed or holy in reference to places or things. The basic meaning of sanctification is separation and mainly implies being set apart for God's use or service. In this sense it is easy to see how persons, places, and things could be set apart or sanctified for God's use.

The Holy Spirit is the agent or Person of God that separates an individual for God's grace in salvation. II Thessalonians 2:13 states:

"But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."

Dr. Charles Baker in *A Dispensational Theology* calls this "positional sanctification", and states that this is "an objective work of God, and not a subjective experience of the believer." The great teaching behind all of this is that we see from God's Word that no one can be saved or sanctified apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. There is another side or dimension to the study and understanding of sanctification. This involves the believer in being separate from evil ways and things. Certainly it is God's will or desire that believers live a holy or separated life. However, He does not force this position. The Word of God plays the major role in our obtaining any degree of separation from the world. Our Lord prayed in John:

"Sanctify them through thy truth; Thy word is truth." (John 17:17)

Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* states:

“This sanctification is God’s will for the believer, I Thessalonians 4:3, and His purpose in calling him by the gospel (verse 7) it must be learned from God as He teaches it by His Word, and it must be pursued by the believer, earnestly and undeviatingly.”

God calls upon the believer to pursue or strive to be separate from sin and the world of selfishness. For instance, in II Corinthians 7:1 we are admonished:

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

This not only shows us that “there is room for improvement” in all of us, but it is impossible to arrive at a place of “sinless perfection” where we cannot sin. Sanctification and “Maturity” go hand in hand. The more we grow in the Word, the closer we get to the Lord, and further away from the pollution of the world. We must think of how great God is, rather than how good we are. We now see that sanctification is both positional and experiential. God sanctifies all believers, makes them “saints” by His grace on the basis of the death of Christ. We cleanse ourselves from the defilement of the world as we yield ourselves to His Word and will. This is Sanctification that is Scriptural.

THE SPIRIT THAT INDWELLS AND FILLS

The confusion in religious circles concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit shouldn't discourage God's children or disparage the Word of God. This confusion and general misunderstanding about the Holy Spirit and His work today should compel us to study even more diligently.

The Holy Spirit is eternal just as the Father and Son are eternal; therefore, any consideration of the ministry of the Spirit, must include all Scripture. However, it is the intent here to mainly think from the time the Spirit came on Pentecost until His work today in the Church, the Body of Christ. Suffice it to say, that in O.T. times, the Spirit of God came upon His chosen individuals for specific tasks and times. During our Lord's earthly ministry, the emphasis is, of course, upon what Jesus began and accomplished in finality on the Cross of Calvary. Our Lord said, in announcing that He was leaving this earth:

“And I will pray the Father and He will give you another Comforter that He may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him; but ye know Him, for He dwelleth with you and shall be in you.” (John 14:16-17)

The Lord Jesus announces this again in John 16:7-15, and sheds further light on the coming and purpose of the Holy Spirit. This purpose is seen in verse 13:

“Howbeit when He, the Spirit of Truth is come, He will guide you into all truth; for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak; and He will show you things to come.”

The Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, (Acts 2) just as the Lord said He would, and many miraculous things happened. Many feel that this was the “birthday of the church,” in men's vocabulary. However, this is not stated in Scripture. We must under-

stand that this is not the first time that the word “church” is used as seen in Acts 2:47. It is used in the gospels, and in Acts 7:38 Israel is called the “church in the wilderness.” It surely appears that Christ baptized the Apostles with the Holy Spirit that they might have power to do His mighty deeds to convince Israel that Jesus was the Messiah. But what about the Holy Spirit’s work today, in this “dispensation of the Grace of God?”

First of all, the work of the Holy Spirit is necessary and vital in salvation. In II Thessalonians 2:13 we read:

“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.”

It is the Holy Spirit that convicts (John 16:8-11) of sin and convinces the sinner of his or her need of the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. He also leads the convicted person to the “belief of the truth.”

Next, we understand the Scripture to teach that the Holy Spirit baptizes the believing person into the Church, the Body of Christ. This is totally by the “faith and operation of God” (Colossians 2:12). This work of the Holy Spirit is what places the person “in Christ.” This is not the same as the baptism the apostles received on the day of Pentecost referred to earlier when they were baptized by Christ “with” the Spirit. The key verses on this great truth are, I Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27.

Another wonderful aspect of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is His “sealing” of those who have trusted Christ. Some people are more interested in the healing of the body than in the sealing of the soul. The Holy Spirit’s work in sealing the believer assures protection and preservation for the believer. Scriptures that teach this great truth are Ephesians 1:13-14; II Corinthians 1:21-22 and Ephesians 4:30.

In conclusion, it is wonderful to believe and know that the Holy Spirit has come to take His residence in our lives. This is the “indwelling” work of the Holy Spirit. I Corinthians 6:19-20

states:

“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost (Spirit) which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your Spirit, which are God’s.”

As we yield ourselves to the Spirit of God, He takes charge or “fills” the believer so we may live close to Him. This is brought to our attention in Ephesians 5:18 where we are admonished to “be filled with the Spirit.” This also enables us to be “strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man” (Ephesians 3:16).

This concise study of “The Spirit That Indwells and Fills” is not exhaustive, but should, along with further study, enable us to know more of God’s Word and Work.

THE BAPTISM THAT IS REAL AND REQUIRED

The subject of baptism is so broad and the interpretations are so varied that it is profitable to just step back and look at it from a scriptural point of view. Also, there has built up across the years a lot of traditional and legendary points of view that only clouds or confuses.

First, it must be accepted that “baptism” is not just a New Testament teaching. It didn’t begin with the baptism of Jesus or else John would not have had any knowledge of its significance. It is John (the baptizer) who gives us the clear explanation of why he baptized Jesus.

“And I knew Him not; but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.” (John 1:31)

Also, we find in Hebrews 9:10, that the “divers washings” that are connected with the Old Testament ordinances are those that are mentioned in Hebrews 6:2 as “the doctrine of baptisms.” In fact, the same original word for “washings” and “baptisms” is used in these Scriptures.

Secondly, it is helpful to understand that not all baptisms taught in Scripture refer to “water” baptism. In other words, the word baptism does not always mean water baptism. For instance it can be found that in one verse, Matthew 3:11, we find three distinct baptisms if read carefully and prayerfully.

“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but He that cometh after me is mightier than I whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.”

It is true, of course, that water baptism is taught from Matthew into the book of Acts as far as the “New Testament” is concerned. However, it must be studied and understood as to the purpose in God’s overall plan for the ages. In other words, the subject of baptism must be understood in light of II Timothy 2:15.

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

Even a cursory examination of Scripture enables us to realize that there are many things that God commanded for certain ages or dispensations that He does not necessarily apply for this age. For instance, the rite of circumcision was given to Abraham and made obligatory on all the male children of Israel. We find the Apostle Paul writing, under inspiration, saying in Galatians 6:15:

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.”

This also enables us to further understand the spiritual baptism that is real and required for salvation and service today. How does this help? In Colossians 2:11-12, we see the truth about spiritual circumcision (vs. 11) that leads on to tell about the baptism that is required and performed by God. The Scripture in Colossians 2:11-12 reads:

“In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God; who hath raised Him from the dead.”

It surely appears that as long as God required water baptism it was for salvation dependent upon repentance. It represented a washing or cleansing and constituted a “sign” to the people of Israel. For instance, the Apostle Peter addressed the “house of Israel” (Acts 2:36) and said:

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 2:38)

It is not only interesting but very enlightening and important to notice that the epistles of Paul do not stress or teach that water baptism is relevant or required. It would be inconceivable to think that a person, especially a preacher, would say what Paul said in I Corinthians 1:14:

“I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius.”

It is also very important to note that the plan of salvation given by the Apostle Paul in his epistles does not contain any mention of water baptism. We know of Ephesians 2:8-9; I Corinthians 15:3-4, and many others that clearly spell out how a person can be saved by God’s grace.

But what about baptism for today? Does God require a real baptism? Surely, He does. The baptism that is required is the Holy Spirit baptizing the believing person into the Body of Christ. I Corinthians 12:13 is ever so clear and plain on this important truth.

“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one Body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.”

What we see about this important subject is that several types or meanings of baptism are found in Scripture. Let’s not just think of “water.” Let’s forget the traditions of men and religious groups, however large or influential, and concentrate on “what saith the Scripture.” Water baptism was in order as long as God was dealing with “the Jew first.” It accompanied the miracles, wonders, and signs as outlined in Mark 16:15-20. Now that God is dealing with the Church, which is the Body of Christ, where the distinction between Jew and Gentile is no longer observed by God, the Holy Spirit is doing the baptizing. He, the Holy Spirit, baptizes the believing sinner into the death of Christ and raises him into a newness of life (Romans 6:3-4). This is totally by the work of God (Colossians 2:12). This is the “one baptism” spoken of in Ephesians 4:5. The saved person doesn’t have to worry

about who baptized him or her: whether it was immersion, sprinkling, or pouring; whether they need to be re-baptized; whether they can be a good testimony or be able to serve God. God has taken care of it all by His baptism! This Baptism by the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ renders the believing sinner “complete in Christ” (Colossians 2:10). He or she can then be a testimony by living a life that pleases God and helps others. Also, having been baptized into God’s church, this person is approved of God to serve in the local assembly or wherever God calls.

THE SUPPER THAT SATISFIES

There is much taught in Scripture about eating and drinking. Some of it refers to literal partaking of food and drink, other portions deal in a metaphorical or symbolic manner. An example of the symbolic sense is a passage, precise and appropriate, in John 6:53-55:

“Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, Verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Of course, in reading and studying Scripture, we should be careful to distinguish between a literal description or account and one that is teaching a spiritual truth. The Lord wasn't talking of a literal eating of His body, but rather the whole chapter is teaching that our Lord is “the Bread of Life.”

With the introduction and inception of the Passover in Exodus 12, God gave to the people of Israel a memorial of their deliverance from bondage. He gave the literal and specific instructions as to the preparation and partaking of the unblemished lamb. There was no question or confusion as to where, why, or how to partake of the deeply significant event. This then became a very important part of the worship of the Jews. Although it is not the intent of this presentation of Bible truth to study this important theme, yet its place in the Bible and its meaning to the Hebrews is important. Its connection to the new testament makes it necessary to understand. It surely was “a supper that satisfies.”

The Lord Jesus Christ, when contemplating the ending of His earthly ministry, instructed His disciples to make ready to eat the Passover. These accounts are found in all four gospels. Jesus and His disciples were following the Old Testament pattern in the observance of this most holy observance. They ate the supper and “as they did eat” (Mark 14:18, 22) Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave it them, and said,

“Take, eat: this is my body; and he took the cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them; and they all drank of it. And He said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” (Mark 14:22-25)

There are many wonderful and significant things to be gleaned from these passages. They partook of a meal and as part of the occasion, Jesus gave a lesson on the “bread” and the “cup.” This allowed the disciples to fulfill the requirements of John 6. Remember He said,

“Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you (vs. 53) ... For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.” (vs. 55)

When we understand that the “Jews require a sign” (I Corinthians 1:22) and that God had taught them through the ages with visible lessons, it is understandable that this method was used during the Passover meal.

There is no real scriptural reason for believing that our Lord instituted something “new” during or “after” He ate the Passover with His disciples. Sometimes we see this idea advanced in headings of verses of the Bible. These words put by man at the beginning of verses are only “man’s words,” not Scripture. Also, we see no observance of a “Lord’s Supper” after the Passover was observed by our Lord and His disciples as recorded in Mark 14; Luke 22; Matthew 26; and John 13. It would seem as if there would be some instructions or mention of its observance before the passages found in I Corinthians. A careful look at the passage concerning the “breaking of bread” in Acts 2:42 will show us that this was no more than a fellowship meal. The same word for “breaking” is found also in Luke 24:35 concerning the Lord’s feeding bread or food to His disciples after His resurrection. In another familiar passage found in Matthew 14:19 when Jesus fed the five thousand, it is said that He “blessed, and brake, and gave

the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.” Were these instances the observing of an ordinance or ritual or just the feeding of a hungry multitude? The context and truth taught makes it obvious that it was simply the provision of food for a meal. The passage in Acts 2:42 is followed in Acts 2:46 by the statement that, “they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking of bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.” In Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, he shows this to mean “an ordinary meal.”

The passages found in I Corinthians 10 and 11, given through the Apostle Paul, refer to Paul’s ministry during the transitional period covered by the book of Acts. It is evident from I Corinthians 10:1-10 that he was addressing “his brethren concerning the flesh; who are Israelites” (Romans 9:3-4). It is also highly significant, and cannot be passed over lightly, that the quotations he spoke are similar, if not just a slight variation, of the words of the Lord Jesus in the Passover passages. In Gaebelien’s *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 10, he says, “the preferred interpretation; however, is probably that Paul received (paralombano) the words of the institution of the

supper through its being passed on through others just as he then passed them on to the Corinthians—i.e., through a process of repetition. Observe the similarity of Paul’s words about the supper with Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22; 14:20.” It surely appears evident that the apostle Paul was reminding these “brethren” that they were corrupting the Passover and had forgotten or had no real knowledge of its meaning. He had earlier told them,

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” (I Corinthians 10:31)

Their actions were certainly not in accord with the purpose of observing the Passover. He had admonished them in I Corinthians 10:20,

“But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice,

they sacrifice to devils, and not to God; and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils."

They were to have "communion" not chaos. The "communion" is also translated "fellowship" and really has nothing to do with a ritual or ordinance. Note its use in the many other passages where it is translated "fellowship." For instance in I John 1:3, 6, 7, it speaks of the fellowship we have with the Father and the Son. In II Corinthians 8:4, it refers to the "fellowship of the ministering to the saints." Paul tells the Philippian saints that he thanks God "for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now." And in a passage found in Ephesians 3:9 the word "fellowship" is found in some translations as "dispensation." Can we have "communion" around this great truth of the fellowship of the mystery today without a symbol or a ritual?

Suffice it to say, that there is a spiritual communion or supper we can all partake of today, that is the partaking of God's Word. If we can see a "spiritual" baptism, a "spiritual" circumcision (Colossians 2:9-13) surely we should see a "spiritual" communion or fellowship. The confusion that surrounds the ritual of the "Lord's Supper" cries out for that which brings all saved people into a common fellowship around the Word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit today. We need that which is real and satisfying, not a ritual that is so misunderstood and misused. The "One Body" of Ephesians 4:4-6 cannot be broken into many pieces and the unity of the Spirit be observed. Thinking that the body of Christ can be (even in symbol) broken and distributed to all people, is not in accord with God's message to the church of this age. We are "to remember" the death baptism of the Lord without a ritual to remind us (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12). Surely we can also remember a fellowship or communion without a ritual. The Lord Jesus, in speaking of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, said,

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

The Apostle Paul in II Timothy 2:11-15 instructs believers of great truths about our life for Him and our life in eternity. He then admonishes Timothy (and us) to “put them in remembrance” of these things. He then follows with the familiar and important verse on “rightly dividing the Word of Truth.” Also in I Timothy 4:6, he instructs,

“If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained.”

The Word of God is what we really need to remind us of what our wonderful Lord has done for us. It was in God’s plan for His chosen people, Israel, to be reminded by a “memorial” (Exodus 12:14). Should we, as members of the Body of Christ, need a ritual to remind us of the work that our Lord accomplished on our behalf? We need to remember that He is now in glory as the “head of the church” (Ephesians 1:22-23) and that, we are to know the truth of Colossians 3:1-4:

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.”

THE CHURCH THAT IS RIGHT

What church should I join? What church is right? Why are there so many different kinds of churches or denominations? Why don't they all believe the same thing? The questions could go on and on. The answer often given is "Just join the church of your choice." A better question could be, "What does the Scripture teach about the Church?" We can be sure we have the right source for an answer in the Scripture. What we do with the Truth is our responsibility to God. This section of *Written For Our Learning* will pursue and present a "what saith the Scripture" means of helping answer our questions.

We should begin by defining our terms. What does the word "church" mean as presented in Scripture? It means in its simplest definition, "a called out group." Examples are abundant in the Old Testament, but Israel, as a nation, is the most outstanding. For example, Israel was "called out" from the rest of the nations to be God's peculiar people for His purpose. This first occurred at the call of Abraham, (Genesis 12:1-3) and later developed through Jacob and Isaac (Genesis 26:24; 28:1-4). Later Jacob's name was changed to Israel (Genesis 32:28). Israel's primary calling was to worship and glorify the Lord in all that He intended for them. As they would congregate to worship the Lord, they were called a "congregation." Later they congregated in specific places to worship. However, it was not the place that was called "church," but the people who were gathered of God. Even when they journeyed in the wilderness, they were called a "church."

"This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall you hear. This is he that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel, which spake to him in Mt. Sinai, and with our fathers; who received the lively oracles to give to us." (Acts 7:37-38)

This very brief "calling out" of His chosen nation to be a church or congregation does help us see the meaning of the word

“church.” A careful reading of Acts 7 will give us a condensed version of God’s dealing with Israel. However, this is only a start in defining and describing our subject, especially as used in the New Testament, and particularly in the Epistles of Paul. All who make a study of the Greek language in which most of the New Testament was written, agree that the word “ekklesia” simply implies a “called out group” and is used some 115 times in the New Testament. However, we must understand that God does the calling when the word is used in worship of Him. We must understand that there is a great difference between His calling out of Israel as a Nation, and His calling out people today to be members of the Church, which is His body (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18; I Corinthians 12:13).

In view of what has been presented, let’s concentrate upon what God is doing today, especially as revealed to and through the Apostle Paul. In this manner, the questions often asked can be given clarification.

First, we must see that only those people who have been saved by God’s grace (Ephesians 2:8-9), justified by the faith of Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:16), are in the body of Christ. It is not up to a person to say, “I want to join God’s church, this is my choice.” A poor lost, dead sinner cannot make a choice. Trying to do this is one reason why there are so many unsaved people in “churches.” A person must acknowledge that he is a sinner and that he is hopeless and helpless to save himself. Then, he should trust the Lord Jesus Christ who loves sinners and died on the cross in his behalf (I Corinthians 15:3-4). God does all the work in saving, justifying, sealing, and adding that believing person to His Church. This is all by the faith and operation of God (Colossians 2:12). The Holy Spirit baptizes the believing one into the church which is the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13). This Church of God is called a “Body” because it is made up of living members just like our human bodies (I Corinthians 12). It is a living organism, not a dead organization. This is the church that is Right.

Since God’s church is composed of only saved people, He sees it as perfect “in Christ.” Ephesians 5:25-26 tells us that it will be presented to Him without spot or wrinkle, or any such

thing, but that it should be “holy and without blemish.” Having seen this most important truth concerning the Church, we still must consider the fact of the saved person’s imperfectness. Also, what about worship here on earth, and the many questions about churches? Let’s now consider “what church is right,” and our relationship to other believers today.

We have seen from God’s Word that the only “church” that is perfect is the Church which is the Body of Christ (Eph. 5:25-26; Eph. 1:22-23). This is true because God sees every believer as being “in Christ.” It must be remembered, however, that as long as we remain on earth in fleshly bodies, imperfections will be seen.

On what basis then can believers worship and work together? It must be acknowledged that fellowship on earth is based on heavenly principles. Also, that relationships on earth must be based on heavenly truths. In I John 1:3-7, we are given the basis for fellowship. Briefly, this passage teaches that fellowship is “with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.” Also, that “we walk in the light as He is in the light” in order to have this fellowship. We must be aware and also beware of groups, or organizations, that go under the heading of “church” and don’t even believe in the Bible or God’s Word or the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. I John 4:1-4 warns:

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the spirit of God; every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God and this is that spirit of Anti-Christ, whereof you have heard that it should come; And even now already is it in the world.”

The word “church” is used so loosely and broadly as to refer to every cult or religious group that desires to use the name. Others have drifted so far from their original position on spiritual truths, that they no longer represent the Lord or His Word. Churches are only “Right” as they remain true to the Scriptures,

rightly divided. (II Timothy 2:15). The apostle Paul wrote to his son in the faith, Timothy:

“Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine: but after their own lust shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears: and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” (II Timothy 4:2-4)

A very pointed and important warning is given in 2 Cor. 11:13-15. It behooves every believer to consider this passage carefully. It informs us that false apostles will change themselves into apostles of Christ; that Satan transforms himself into an angel of light; and that Satan has “ministers” who pose as ministers of righteousness. Believers must keep their mind, heart, and eyes upon the Lord and His Word. Personalities come and go, but the Person of Christ is permanent.

In spite of all the falseness in the world of religion, we must always thank God that believers can come together and worship the Lord. The Word admonishes and encourages believers to assemble together, pray, study the Scriptures, and love one another. Where we worship and with whom we worship should be a very definite matter of prayer, and reflection. If our priorities and values are spiritually correct, we most likely will worship correctly. If we give the preeminence or first place to the Body of Christ, God’s true church, then we are more likely to make a right choice for worship on earth. The Scripture in Colossians 3:1-3 is so appropriate and meaningful to every occasion. It reads:

“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.”

THE SECURITY THAT IS ETERNAL

How secure and lasting is the salvation that God has given us in Christ Jesus? What assurance do those who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ have as to their eternal destiny? The answer to these questions not only effects our emotional stability in the present, but determines our thoughts and feelings about life after death. Is this important? Nothing could be more important or vital to our life now and what awaits us in the future life.

The Apostle Paul in writing to the Philippian believers assured them by saying:

“Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:6)

In the book of Romans, which vividly describes our lost and sinful condition by nature, we are graciously told that there is “no condemnation” to them that are in Christ Jesus (8:1). And then Romans 8:39 lets us know that there is “no separation” from the love of God. In fact, we are instructed that nothing can separate us from God’s love.

The doctrine or teaching of the assurance of the believer is predicated squarely upon the faithfulness of God to His Word. It also depends upon His righteousness and the work He has accomplished through Christ. Confessedly, this goes counter to our human reasoning and feeling. However, this is true of many of God’s great pronouncements and promises.

It doesn’t seem “reasonable” that one man could die for the sins of all mankind, but this is exactly what God says that He did (I Corinthians 15:3-4). We have to believe that “nothing is impossible with God.” In short, we have to believe God’s Word and not our feelings or our human experiences.

One principle that helps in understanding this great truth is to make the distinction between salvation and rewards. Since it is a Biblical teaching that there can be gain or loss of rewards in accordance to how we live, it is natural to assume that we could lose the salvation that God gives. Salvation is not an earned reward,

but a free gift of God's grace. The Apostle Paul, himself, was constantly conscious of his manner of life for God, therefore, He didn't want to "beat the air" or shadow-box. He kept his body under subjection lest he would be "disapproved" (I Corinthians 9:26-27). *The Scofield Reference Bible* has a pertinent note on this verse which in part says, "The Apostle is writing of service, not salvation. He is not expressing fear that he may fail of salvation, but of his crown (reward)." *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* in commenting on this says, "Here Paul was not addressing the issue of salvation, nor for that matter was even the prize specifically in mind. Rather he seemed concerned with the continuance in the race." Again, it should be emphasized that salvation is by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross, and not by works that we have done or not done. I Corinthians 3:11-15 is helpful in this regard.

Another distinction that must be made in order to properly put eternal life in perspective is to differentiate between God's dealings with Israel as a nation, and the church, which is the Body of Christ. The reason this is important is because many Old Testament passages seem to indicate that God will turn away from His own. However, when it is seen that many of God's promises to His chosen people, Israel, were either for temporary purposes or in regard to certain blessings which were earthly, this then becomes understandable. For instance, they were promised a certain land, yet because of their unfaithfulness, not God's unfaithfulness, they are still having difficulty even in claiming Jerusalem. They have not entered into their rest and never will until they acknowledge the Christ (Hebrews 4:6-11). Sometimes, Psalm 51:11-12 is cited as a reason for our losing our salvation. Again careful consideration shows that David in sinning against God lost his fellowship or joy of being a child of God. Therefore, he prayed in Psalm 51:10:

"Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me."

David was careful to say "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation" (51:12). It was the fellowship that he had let slip away

from him and missed so much in his dreadful condition.

It is so important in our consideration of Scripture to “rightly divide the Word of Truth” (II Timothy 2:15). We understand that God in this dispensation is dealing with the Church, the Body of Christ in which there is neither Jew nor Gentile. By the baptism of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:13) the believing person is placed securely in the church. This, of course, is after he or she has believed the gospel of God’s grace (I Corinthians 15:3-4). Because of the finished work of Christ accounted to the believer, God can announce through Paul:

“And ye are complete in Him, who is the Head of all principality and power.” (Colossians 2:10)

It can be humanly said, “God puts the sure in assurance.” Also, in reading Ephesians 1:12-14, it is shown that “since we believed” we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. This is also clearly stated in Ephesians 4:30, which also admonished us to not “grieve” the Holy Spirit.

“And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.”

And we can say, “To the praise of His glory.”

Scriptures of Assurance:

John 3:36; II Corinthians 5:17; John 5:24; Colossians 2:10; I John 5:13; Ephesians 1:6

REJOICING IN RECONCILIATION

“And, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven. And you, that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unprovable in His sight.” (Col.1:20-22)

How we should rejoice in the mercy of God! When we realize that the world was alienated by sin, we can see the necessity for God to institute His great plan for reconciliation. We will mainly consider this great truth from the cross of Christ to its further development in the epistles, especially of Paul.

In Romans 5:10, we are told:

“For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

This very clearly teaches that reconciliation is dependent upon the death of Christ. This is God’s way of reconciling the world and individual sinners to Himself. God doesn’t need to reconcile Himself to the sinner, but the sinner needs to be reconciled to God. It is totally a “one way street.” God hasn’t done anything wrong. In family or business disputes, it is usually true that both parties are wrong. For instance, in I Corinthians 7:11, the apostle Paul instructs the departing wife to be “reconciled” to her husband. However, in the case of the “world,” we are shown that “all the world has become guilty before God” (Romans 3:19). Knowing that “God so loved the world,” we can readily understand why He was willing for His only begotten Son to die to provide reconciliation whereby sinners can be saved by simply believing:

“That Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried and that He arose again the third

day according to the scriptures.” (I Corinthians 15:3-4)

Another great truth involved in the study and understanding of reconciliation is that through the death of Christ, Jew and Gentile have been brought together in one body. It should be understood that in the major portion of God’s Word, there was the distinction made between the Jew and the non-Jew (Gentile). When we see this, the Old Testament, Gospels, and the first part of the book of Acts become more meaningful. In the book of Ephesians we are taught that Gentiles were “without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.” The use of the word “aliens” shows that Gentiles were alienated, consequently the need to be reconciled. Ephesians 2:11-18 then proceeds to show how God reconciled both, Jew and Gentile, into one body. Then it is summed up in Ephesians 2:16:

“And that He might reconcile both unto God in one Body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.”

Both, Jew and Gentile, were guilty before God. Since Israel rejected Christ and God’s offer of the Kingdom, they were set aside and became “outsiders” as well as the Gentile. Both needed to be reconciled to God. The means for this was the death of Christ on the Cross. The person to be commissioned for the work or ministry of reconciliation was the Apostle Paul (II Corinthians 5:17-20). It is through the Apostle Paul that we are introduced to the “joint body” in which there is neither Jew nor Gentile (Ephesians 3:1-10). Our heavenly Father makes no distinction between Jew or Gentile today in saving the lost. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ saves to the uttermost, all who come to Him by faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross. In Colossians 3:11 we are told:

“Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all and in all.”

Not only has God reconciled the world and the Jew and Gen-

tile into one body, the Church, but we can rejoice in reconciliation to know this includes every individual who comes to Christ. In the great and important passage found in Colossians 1:20-21, we find that God has reconciled “all things unto Himself.” This includes even the creation that was affected by the original sin of Adam. However, God, through Christ, has even taken care of the redemption and restoration of His creation (Romans 8:21-22). It is so important to see, though, that God is interested in the individual. Notice in Colossians 1:21:

“And you, that were sometimes alienated and enemies in Your mind by wicked works, yet now has He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight.”

This great truth of reconciliation is clearly taught in II Corinthians 5:14-21. This needs to be read and studied carefully. It teaches us of so many things, but we see that when God reconciled the world to Himself, He provided for individuals that would believe the gospel of God’s grace. In verse 20, of the above passage, stress is laid upon the individual. Notice the underscored pronouns, (underscoring is made by the writer), in the following Scripture:

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

It is wonderful to see the results that have and will be accrued by God’s act of reconciliation. These should make us rejoice in reconciliation. First, we see that “old things have passed away.” These “old things” not only consist of sins, but the letter of the law and the ordinances and requirements of the law. We also see that “all things are become new.” Not only a new life, but new ways of looking at life. Also, “the new man,” the Church which is Christ’s Body, is now preeminent in God’s plans and purposes (Ephesians 1:19-23). Practically, it enables us to have new friends, new relationships with our heavenly Father, other believ-

ers and ourselves. Also, a brand new outlook and future.

REJOICE IN RECONCILIATION!

EVEN SO, COME LORD JESUS

The great prevailing prophetic theme of the word of God centers around the comings of the Lord Jesus. A tremendous amount of joy from Biblical learning will come to those who pursue the truth of our Lord's coming as a baby and His life here on earth. However, we must go further and look into His promised coming again. We must never forget He said in John 14:3:

“And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”

There isn't much difficulty in distinguishing between the “first coming of Christ” and the “second coming of Christ.” However, we should be careful in using the terms “first” and “second.” It is true that in Hebrews 9:28 we are told:

“...and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.”

In other words, His second coming to earth will be in a different manner and for a different purpose than His birth in Bethlehem. He came to live among men and to “humble Himself and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). His next coming to earth will be to execute judgment upon the anti-Christ and an unbelieving world (Revelation 19:11-21). The first time He died for the sin of all mankind (I Corinthians 15:3-4). The “second” time He will not be crucified by wicked hands, but will “smite the nations, and rule them with a rod of iron.” This, no doubt, is what the Apostle John was looking for when he said:

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

When we study in the last book of the Bible, Revelation, we note that several times the Lord said, “I come quickly.” This expression is found in Revelation 2:16 and 3:11, and three times in

the last chapter, 22:7, 12, 20.

Of course, the major prophetic theme and the numerous pronouncements tell us that He is coming again, and when He does come back to earth, He will set up His kingdom and then there will be:

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” (Luke 2:14)

There is another aspect of our Lord’s coming that is of even greater importance to all members of God’s Church or out-calling today. Israel, God’s chosen nation through whom Christ the Messiah would come, still is looking for His coming. They, Israel, rejected and crucified their promised Messiah (Acts 2:22-24). In the meantime, while blindness in part has happened to Israel, God is saving sinners and adding them to the Church, the Body of Christ. This includes individuals from all peoples that inhabit the earth. That is why He can say “Whosoever will, let him come.” Also, He can clearly announce:

“For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” (I Corinthians 12:13)

In view of what God is doing in this “dispensation of the grace of God” (Ephesians 3:2), we can understand that, as members of His Church, we have a different hope concerning the appearing of our Lord. Although we should certainly rejoice that He came some 2000 years ago and died for our sins on Calvary, and that He will surely come to earth again, we especially look for His coming for us. It is taught in the epistles of Paul for the Church today, that He is coming for His Church and that we shall be “caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (I Thess. 4:17). The coming of the Lord for His Church is imminent, that is, all things are ready, nothing needs to be fulfilled; therefore we can say with John;

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

God is ready to come, but the question is, are we ready? We cannot just decide to make ourselves ready or prepared for His coming. The matter of sin must be dealt with. When we see, “that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), we really see why He came the first time—to die for our sins. Yet as individual sinners each person must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Saviour.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

THE CHRISTIAN'S EVALUATION

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” II Corinthians 5:10

In almost every area of our lives we are responsible or accountable to someone or to a system. This accountability includes our parents, our spouses, our teachers, our friends, and even our government. Job evaluation is an on-going part of employment. The evaluation may result in advancement or demotion, more pay or less pay. We accept these as realities; however, very little thought is given as to our responsibility and accountability to God!

The Scripture is clear that everyone is accountable to God. This does not mean that everyone who has lived on earth will be evaluated for the same reasons, at the same time, and at the same place. This is surely a vital subject that must be “rightly divided” and comparative and contrasting Scriptures be considered.

This great truth can be approached through considering the place, the person, and the purpose.

The Placed

The place specifically referred to in II Corinthians 5:10 is “the judgment seat of Christ.” This must be distinguished from “the great white throne” of Revelation 20:11. The judgment seat of Christ has to do mainly with the believer’s action while in this body, whereas the great white throne has to do with unbelievers and their eternal destiny. Both of these judgments take place in heaven; however, not at the same time for the same purpose. The Scripture teaches nothing concerning a “general” resurrection or a “general” judgment. When we think of place, we should not necessarily think of an exact location in God’s great space, but rather where discriminating and discerning decisions will be made. We often speak of a place of prayer, or a place of refuge without specifying an exact location in heaven or earth. The word “seat”

implies that Christ will be a step above those appearing and He will have all the authority and the facts at His disposal.

The Person and the Persons

We are clearly told in II Corinthians 5:10 and Romans 14:10 that this is the tribunal of Christ. We see from John 5:22 that:

“For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.”

Of course, knowing that the Father and the Son are one (John 10:30, 38), and knowing that the Son’s judgment of sin at the cross is the basis of all judgment, we can readily understand the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Believing that “Christ died for our sins” by His substitutionary sacrifice, we can rest assured our sins will not be a basis for our appearing at the judgment seat of Christ. That price has been paid in full; however, our words and deeds after salvation will be accounted for at His tribunal. Christ is the wisdom of God (I Corinthians 1:30), therefore He is able to be decisive on every aspect of the believer’s life. It should also be noted that the word “appear” implies more than our just being present at His judgment. Appear means to be manifested or clearly seen and understood or evaluated. We shall be fully known through His infinite wisdom and full knowledge.

The Purpose

The reason or purpose for the believer appearing before the judgment seat of Christ is to be recompensed for “the things done in his body.” This, no doubt, will include things we knew to do and didn’t, and things we knew we shouldn’t do and did them anyway. The real basis will finally be if the deeds were done in His name and for His glory. The very attributes of God Himself, which include justice, righteousness, truth, and love will form the criteria for judgment of what we, as believers, have done. The apostle Paul said in this regard:

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

When we read in II Corinthians 5:11 that we are to know the “terror” of the Lord, it carries the meaning of our fearing or trusting the Lord. We needn’t be terrified of being cast out of His presence, but rather to have reverential trust and respect for His person and authority.

Paul goes on to say, “But we are made manifest unto God.” This shows that when we appear, He will already know all about us. We will not plead our case!

It cannot be emphasized too much or too often that “the judgment seat of Christ” will not be for the purpose of deciding whether we are saved or lost or to receive punishment for sins. We must never forget:

“For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” (II Corinthians 5:21)

We should look forward to this day, not dread it. As we have studied and stated, the purpose is to be evaluated by our Lord on the basis of His wisdom and justice as to our deeds here on earth in these bodies of clay. However, remember, this will be our first face to face encounter with the Lord! We will rejoice in this and look forward to walking with Him in Glory throughout eternity.

“I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

STATING OUR STANDING

“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him; rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith ...” (Colossians 2:8-9)

Sometimes in our fervor to herald forth the wondrous “good news” that people may be saved, we fail to follow up with what God actually does in saving a soul. What is the condition or position of the one who is saved by God’s grace? What is contained in salvation other than being rescued from eternal separation from God? The answer to these and many more questions is included in the standing or position God gives and assures to the one who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. However, it is necessary for the believer to understand that it is important how he or she lives after being saved in order to attest to the fact of salvation. That is what we mean by “Stating (what we do for God) Our Standing” (what God has done for us).

When God saves a sinner He renders that person just or righteous on the basis of His own judicial decision. This decision is based on the righteous and perfect work accomplished by the Lord Jesus in His death for sin. We could never be justified on the basis of our own goodness or merit. Truly, our self-righteous acts are considered as “filthy rags” in His sight. Romans 3:23-24 states:

“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

After being declared justified, God can impute or literally account many things to the believer such as, redemption, sanctification, and glorification. Also, of utmost importance, it must be seen that by the baptizing of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:13), the believing person is placed into the Church which is Christ’s Body. Now, since we are taught that Christ is in heaven as head of the Church (Ephesians 1:19-23), we can see that we are “positioned” in the “heavenlies.” Certainly, we could have never

accomplished this for or by ourselves. This is entirely a work of God. This work of God procures and secures our standing before God! This standing or position never varies. This standing is perfect. This truly is the meaning of the expression, “in Christ”, used so many times in Paul’s epistles, especially Ephesians.

However, there is another side to the coin. In studying Scripture we are always confronted with the order of God’s Word. Doctrine or teaching is always put first or emphasized first. For instance, in the book of Ephesians, chapters 1-3, are mainly doctrinal while chapters 4-6 are mainly devotional, The first chapters teach us of what God has done and how, whereas, the latter chapters emphasize what and how we are to walk, worship, and work for Him.

Our lead Scripture, Colossians 2:8, teaches us that:

“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him.”

We “received” the Lord Jesus by giving up or completely trusting the Lord to save us. In like manner, we are to “walk” in Him by giving up our own puny efforts and trust Him! This isn’t easy. This, however, is what is taught us in Philippians 2:12,13. We are told to “work out our own salvation.” We know this doesn’t refer to the saving of our souls, because we are taught so clearly that, “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us” (Titus 3:5). “Working out” means we are to bring it to its goal. We cannot perfect the salvation God has so freely given. It is already perfect as God is perfect; however, we work at fulfilling what God desires in our life of salvation. In other words, we should be working at making our earthly lives match the heavenly gift of God. This isn’t easy, either. Our state isn’t always perfect. We live in and are surrounded by the world and its worldliness. The world’s effect on the believer can be devastating, yet, we cannot underestimate the power of God’s Word to give us victory. When the Apostle Paul had accounted his frailties and faults as a natural man, he wrote:

“O, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from

the body of death?”

He then exclaimed:

“I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 7:24-25)

The “walk” of the believer should encompass the life to be led by the Word through the ministration of the Holy Spirit.

It is hard for our finite minds to understand we are “citizens of heaven” (Philippians 3:20-21) and at the same time still physically live here on earth, yet this is what God’s Word teaches us. Now, our work is laid out for us. God’s work is completed and we are declared “complete in Him” (Colossians 2:10). But what about our work for Him? We need to be about Stating our Standing.

CALLING OUT, TO AND UP

In the broadest sense everyone has been born into this life for some purpose. There should be a reason or explanation for our existence in the natural state. However, this is not necessarily a real calling of God to serve Him. God, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, calls a person to receive the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be saved. It is saved ones that God calls for service. Please read and consider the verses in II Thessalonians 2:13-14.

“But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth.”

The apostle Paul referred to these people in II Thessalonians 2:14 as “called by our gospel.” He also taught that they were “set apart” by the Spirit, and they had believed the truth. This could be a,

Call to Salvation

We are told that God wills or desires for all men to be saved. This includes people of all walks of life. God is no respecter of persons. However, it must be understood that only those who “believe the truth” of the gospel will be saved. The calling of God is to all men, but His salvation only comes to the “whosoever believeth” (John 3:16). We must always remember that the Word of God says,

“He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 3:18)

We are told in Romans 10:17,

“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the

Word of God.”

We hear God’s call by “hearing” God’s Word. The gospel is laid out in I Corinthians 15:3-4, and then clearly stated in Ephesians 2:8-9,

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”

There is also a,

Call to Service

“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.” (I Corinthians 1:26)

The verses following tell why God chooses and calls. First it is that “no flesh should glory in his presence” (vs. 29) and then, “That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (vs. 31). God’s calling to His service is for His glory and not for man’s glory. How different from what has become all too “prevalent in religious” circles. It is really good to see that in I Corinthians 1:9 we are told that,

“God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Not only does He call to service, but to fellowship as well! We are admonished, though, to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called” (Ephesians 4:1).

In the spiritual sense, when a person is “called out” of the world, that person is “called into” the one body, the church. (Ephesians 4:-6). This means that although believers are “in the world, they are not of the world.” The true Church is a “heavenly” organism wherein is eternal life. This shows that we have been “called out” and “called up.” Ephesians 2:6 teaches us

that,

“... And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

Since all those who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior are in the Church, which is the Body of Christ, we can know “the hope of his calling” (Eph. 1:18). This also gives us the incentive and desire to “press toward the mark for the high calling (calling on high) of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14). All of these great and inspiring truths are considered as holy callings. See how the apostle Paul puts it in II Timothy 1:9.

“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”

It is good to know that God called us out of darkness to eternal life and light in saving us. He calls us into service and fellowship as we yield to Him and His will. One of these days He will call us home or up and out of this world to see Him and be like Him.

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