

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW
TO LIVE A BALANCED, SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

Foundational Truths

FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING



Derek Prince

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INTRODUCTION

FOR FIFTY YEARS I have been teaching, counseling, and praying for Christians from a multitude of national and denominational backgrounds. The problems in their lives have been as varied as their backgrounds, but underneath them all I have continually discerned one basic deficiency: they have never laid a sound doctrinal foundation. Consequently, they have never been able to build a stable, successful Christian life.

I picture such Christians as people who have purchased a lot for the purpose of building a home for themselves. On this, over the years, they have assembled a mass of materials, acquired from attending various churches, conferences, seminars, or even Bible colleges. Yet, in spite of all this, no house has ever been built. All they have to show for their activity is an ever-growing pile of things they have acquired—building materials, furnishings, appliances, and so on.

From time to time they attend yet another conference and return with some special item for the house—perhaps a marble bath or an oak front door. Yet the house never takes shape. The reason is simple: they have never laid the necessary foundation.

Does this description perhaps apply to you—or to someone whom you are trying to counsel?

In this book you will be confronted—possibly for the first time in your life—with the fact that there is a specific foundation of biblical doctrines that you must lay before you can build a successful Christian life. You will discover that the Bible reveals six such doctrines. (See Hebrews 6:1–2.) If you work carefully through the book, you will be thoroughly grounded in all six of them. You will also discover how they fit into the total revelation of Scripture.

Once you have mastered these foundational doctrines and learned how to apply them practically in your life, you will be in a position to make use of all that material you have been piling up through the years—even the marble bath and the oak front door!

This is not a dream or mere wishful thinking. It is something extremely real and practical. It works!

I have proved this in two ways. First, it has worked in my own life. I have been able to build a life of successful Christian service that has stood the test of more than fifty difficult and strenuous years.

Second, it has produced similar results in the lives of countless others to whom I have ministered. I hardly ever attend a church or a conference in any nation where I am not approached by some grateful Christian who says, “Brother Prince, I want to thank you that your teaching has given me a solid foundation on which I have been building for many years.”

The material for this book was developed for my first radio program, *The Study Hour*, which was broadcast once a week during 1963 and 1964. I continued the program for a year, resulting in fifty-two separate studies. Transcripts were eventually produced and compiled into seven books. A dozen years later I revised and edited all of the material, which was then published in Great Britain as a single volume.

The present volume has been subjected to further scrutiny and revision. In each case the purpose has been to make the contents as accurate and as easy to read as possible.

This material has been translated—either wholly or in part—into at least twenty languages, which include Arabic, Albanian, Chinese, Hebrew, Hungarian, Indonesian, Mongolian, Russian, and Serbo-Croatian.

It has not been possible to keep an exact record of all the copies that have been distributed, but they total tens of thousands.

A comprehensive correspondence course titled *Christian Foundations* was developed in 1983 for in-depth, personal study of this book. Students—both ministers and lay people—have been enrolled from every continent.

Though the material has had a global impact, it has never been printed as a single volume in the United States, nor has it been easily available through Christian bookstores in the States. I am delighted that this single-volume American edition has finally become a reality. It also contains an expanded topical index.

In closing, let me offer a word of counsel to each reader: Try to approach these studies with an open heart and mind. Do your best to lay aside any personal prejudices or preconceptions you may have—whether intellectual or religious. Let God speak directly to you in His own words. He has much to say to you—and all of it is for your good.

How to Use

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTHS FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTHS FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING is designed to help you lay a solid foundation on which to build your Christian faith. Its special features and study helps include:

Table of contents

The table of contents is expanded to list all the headings within each chapter. This will help you locate the information you are seeking and provide you with a helpful framework for reading the entire section.

Topical index

To help you find answers to the most basic questions of the Christian faith, the entire volume has been analyzed exhaustively to provide a thorough listing. Page numbers are included to the right of each entry.

PART I

FOUNDATION FOR FAITH



*Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings
and does them, I will show you whom he is like:
He is like a man building a house, who dug deep
and laid the foundation on the rock.*

—LUKE 6:47-48—

Introduction to Part I

ABOUT THE BIBLE

ADHERENTS TO THE Christian faith throughout the world today number at least one billion persons. This total includes Christians from all sections of the church, in all areas of the earth, and from a multitude of racial backgrounds. Not all these are actively practicing their faith, but all are recognized as adherents. As such, they constitute one of the largest and most significant elements in the world's population.

Virtually all these Christians recognize the Bible as the authoritative basis of their faith and practice. The Bible also plays a significant role in two other major world religions: Judaism and Islam. By all objective standards it is the most widely read and influential book in the history of the human race. Year after year it consistently heads the list of the best-selling books of the world. It is obvious, therefore, that any person who desires a good general education cannot afford to omit the study of the Bible.

The Bible, as we have it today, is divided into two major sections. The first section, the Old Testament, contains thirty-nine books. It was written primarily in Hebrew—although a few portions were written in a sister Semitic language called Aramaic. The second section, the New Testament, contains twenty-seven books. The oldest extant manuscripts are in Greek.

The Old Testament describes briefly the creation of the world and, in particular, of Adam. It relates how Adam and his wife, Eve, disobeyed God and thereby brought a series of evil consequences upon themselves, their descendants, and the entire environment in which God had placed them. It then goes on to trace in outline the history of the first generations descended from Adam.

After eleven chapters, the Old Testament focuses on Abraham, a man chosen by God to be the father of a special people, through whom God purposed to provide redemption for the entire human race. It records the origin and history of this special people, to whom God gave the name Israel. Altogether, the Old Testament records the dealings of God with Abraham and his descendants over a period of about two thousand years.

The Old Testament reveals various important aspects of God's character and His dealings both with individuals and with nations. Included in this revelation are God's justice and His judgments; His wisdom and His power;

His mercy and His faithfulness. The Old Testament particularly emphasizes God's faithfulness to keep the covenants and promises He makes, whether with individuals or with nations.

Central to God's special purpose for Israel was His promise, sealed by His covenant, that He would send them a deliverer with the God-given task of redeeming mankind from all the consequences of his rebellion and restoring him to God's favor. The Hebrew title of this deliverer was Messiah—which means literally “anointed one.”

The New Testament records the outworking of this promise in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth. This is indicated by the title given Him: Christ. This title is derived from a Greek word—*Christos*—which means precisely the same as the Hebrew title Messiah—that is, “anointed one.” Jesus came to Israel as the anointed One whom God had promised in the Old Testament. He fulfilled everything that the Old Testament had foretold about His coming. Viewed from this perspective, the Old Testament and the New Testament are linked together to form a single, harmonious revelation of God and His purposes for man.

Chapter One

THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

IN VARIOUS PLACES the Bible compares the life of a believer to the construction of a building. For instance, the Epistle of Jude says: "Building yourselves up on your most holy faith" (v. 20).

The apostle Paul also uses the same picture in various places:

You are God's building... as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation.

—1 CORINTHIANS 3:9-10

You also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.

—EPHESIANS 2:22

I commend you... to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up.

—ACTS 20:32

In all these passages the believer's life is compared to the construction of a building.

Now, in the natural order, the first and most important feature of any permanent structure is its foundation. The foundation necessarily sets a limit to the weight and height of the building to be erected upon it. A weak foundation can support only a small building. A strong foundation can support a large building. There is a fixed relationship between the foundation and the building.

In the city of Jerusalem I once lived in a house that had been built by an Assyrian. This man had obtained from the municipality a license to build a house of two stories, and the foundation was laid accordingly. However, in order to increase his income from renting the building, this Assyrian had built on a third story without obtaining permission to do so. The result was that, while we were actually living in the house, the whole building began to settle down on one corner and eventually went right out of perpendicular. What was the reason for this? The foundation was not strong enough to support the house that the man tried to erect upon it.

Even so, in the spiritual order the same thing happens in the lives of many professing Christians. They set out with every intention of raising a

fine, imposing edifice of Christianity in their lives. But, alas, before long their fine edifice begins to sink, to sag, to get out of true. It leans grotesquely. Sometimes it collapses completely and leaves nothing but a ruined heap of vows and prayers and good intentions that have gone unfulfilled.

Beneath this mass of ruins the reason for the failure lies buried. It was the foundation. Never properly laid, it was unable to support the fine edifice that had been planned.

Christ the Rock

What, then, is God's appointed foundation for the Christian life? The answer is clearly given by the apostle Paul: "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11).

This is confirmed also by Peter as he spoke of Jesus Christ: "Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious'" (1 Pet. 2:6).

Here Peter is referring to the passage in Isaiah that reads: "Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation'" (Isa. 28:16). Thus Old Testament and New Testament alike agree in this vital fact: the true foundation of the Christian life is Jesus Christ Himself—nothing else, and no one else. It is not a creed, a church, a denomination, an ordinance, or a ceremony. It is Jesus Christ Himself—and "no other foundation can anyone lay."

Consider the words of Jesus.

When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

—MATTHEW 16:13–18

It has sometimes been suggested that these words of Jesus mean that Peter is the rock upon which the Christian church is to be built, and thus that Peter is in some sense the foundation of Christianity rather than Christ Himself. This question is of such vital and far-reaching importance that it is imperative to examine the words of Jesus very carefully to ascertain their proper meaning.

**The true foundation of the Christian life is
Jesus Christ Himself—nothing else, and no one else.**

In the original Greek of the New Testament there is, in Christ's answer to Peter, a deliberate play upon words. In Greek, the name "Peter" is *Petros*; the word for "rock" is *petra*. Playing upon this similarity in sound, Jesus says, "You are Peter [*Petros*], and on this rock [*petra*] I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18).

Though there is a similarity in sound between these two words, their meaning is quite different. *Petros* means a small stone or a pebble. *Petra* means a large rock. The idea of building a church upon a pebble would obviously be ridiculous and therefore could not be Christ's real meaning.

Jesus uses this play on words to bring out the truth He is seeking to impart. He is not identifying Peter with the rock; on the contrary, He is contrasting Peter with the rock. He is pointing out how small and insignificant the little stone, Peter, is in comparison to the great rock upon which the church is to be built.

Common sense and Scripture alike confirm this fact. If the church of Christ were really founded upon the apostle Peter, it would surely be the most insecure and unstable edifice in the world. Later in the same chapter of Matthew's Gospel we read that Jesus began to forewarn His disciples of His impending rejection and crucifixion. The account then continues:

Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

—MATTHEW 16:22–23

Here Christ directly charges Peter with being influenced by the opinions of men, and even by the promptings of Satan himself. How could such a man be the foundation of the entire Christian church?

Later on in the Gospels we read that, rather than confess Christ before a serving maid, Peter publicly denied his Lord three times.

Even after the Resurrection and the Day of Pentecost, Paul tells us that Peter was influenced by fear of his countrymen to compromise at one point concerning the truth of the gospel. (See Galatians 2:11–14.)

Surely, then, Peter was no rock. He was lovable, impetuous, a born leader—but a man just like the rest, with all the inherent weaknesses of humanity. The only rock upon which Christian faith can be based is Christ Himself.

Confirmation of this vital fact is found also in the Old Testament.

The psalmist David, prophetically inspired by the Holy Spirit, says this:

The LORD is my rock... in whom I will trust;
My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

—PSALM 18:2

In Psalm 62 David makes a similar confession of faith.

Truly my soul silently waits for God;
From Him comes my salvation.
He only is my rock and my salvation;
He is my defense;
I shall not be greatly moved....

My soul, wait silently for God alone....
He only is my rock and my salvation;
He is my defense;
I shall not be moved.
In God is my salvation and my glory;
The rock of my strength,
And my refuge, is in God.

—PSALM 62:1-2, 5-7

Nothing could be plainer than that. The word *rock* occurs three times, and the word *salvation* occurs four times. That is to say, the words *rock* and *salvation* are by this scripture intimately and inseparably joined. Each is found only in one person, and that Person is the Lord Himself. This is emphasized by the repetition of the word *only*.

If anyone should require yet further confirmation of this, we may turn to the words of Peter himself. Speaking to the people of Israel concerning Jesus, Peter says:

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

—ACTS 4:12

The Lord Jesus Christ, therefore, is the true rock, the rock of ages, in whom there is salvation. The person who builds upon this foundation can say, like David:

He only is my rock and my salvation;
He is my defense;
I shall not be moved.

—PSALM 62:6

Confrontation

How, then, does a person build upon this rock, which is Christ?

Let us turn back again to that dramatic moment when Christ and Peter stood face-to-face and Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). We have seen that Christ is the rock. But it is not Christ in isolation or abstraction. Peter had a definite personal experience. There were four successive stages in this experience.

1. A direct, personal confrontation of Peter by Christ. Christ and Peter stood face-to-face. There was no mediator between them. No other human being played any part at all in the experience.
2. A direct, personal revelation granted to Peter. Jesus said to Peter, "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 16:17). This was not the outcome of natural reasoning or intellectual understanding. It was the outcome of a direct spiritual revelation to Peter by God the Father Himself.
3. A personal acknowledgment by Peter of the truth that had thus been revealed to him.
4. An open and public confession by Peter of the truth that he acknowledged.

In these four successive stages we see what it means to build upon the rock. There is nothing abstract, intellectual, or theoretical about the whole thing. Each stage involves a definite, individual experience.

The first stage is a direct, personal confrontation of Christ. The second stage is a direct, spiritual revelation of Christ. The third stage is a personal acknowledgment of Christ. The fourth stage is an open and personal confession of Christ.

Through these four experiences, Christ becomes for each individual believer the rock upon which his faith is built.

Revelation

The question arises: can a person today come to know Christ in the same direct, personal way that Peter came to know Him?

The answer is yes, for the following two reasons: First, it was not Christ in His purely human nature who was revealed to Peter; Peter already knew Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter's son. The One who was now revealed to Peter was the divine, eternal, unchanging Son of God. This is the same Christ who now lives exalted in heaven at the Father's right hand. In the passage of nearly two thousand years there has been no change in Him at all. He is still Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever. As He was revealed to Peter, He can still be revealed today to those who sincerely seek Him.

Second, the revelation did not come by "flesh and blood"—by any physical or sensory means. It was a spiritual revelation, the work of the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit who gave this revelation to Peter is still at work in all the world, revealing the same Christ. Jesus Himself promised His disciples:

When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.

—JOHN 16:13–14

Since spiritual revelation is in the eternal, spiritual realm, it is not limited by material or physical factors, such as the passage of time or the change of language, customs, clothing, or circumstances.

This personal experience of Jesus Christ the Son of God—by the Holy Spirit revealed, acknowledged, and confessed—remains the one unchanging rock, the one immovable foundation, upon which all true Christian faith must be based. Creeds and opinions, churches and denominations—all these may change, but this one true rock of God's salvation by personal faith in Christ remains eternal and unchanging. Upon it a person may build his faith for time and for eternity with a confidence that nothing can ever overthrow.

Acknowledgment

Nothing is more striking in the writings and testimony of the early Christians than their serenity and confidence concerning their faith in Christ. Jesus says:

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

—JOHN 17:3

This is not merely to know God in a general way through nature or conscience as Creator or Judge. This is to know Him revealed personally in Jesus Christ. Neither is it to know about Jesus Christ merely as a historical character or a great teacher. It is to know Christ Himself, directly and personally, and God in Him. The apostle John writes:

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

—1 JOHN 5:13

The early Christians not only believed, but they also knew. They had an experiential faith, which produced a definite knowledge of that which they believed.

A little further on in the same chapter John writes again:

We know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ.

—1 JOHN 5:20

Note the humble, yet serene, confidence of these words. Their basis is knowledge of a person, and that Person is Jesus Christ Himself. Paul gave the same kind of personal testimony when he said:

I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

—2 TIMOTHY 1:12

Notice that Paul did not say, “I know what I have believed.” He said, “I know whom I have believed.” His faith was not founded upon a creed or a church, but upon a Person whom he knew by direct acquaintance—Jesus Christ. As a result of this personal acquaintance with Christ, he had a serene confidence concerning the well-being of his soul, which nothing in time or eternity could overthrow.

Confession

For a number of years I conducted regular street meetings in London, England. At the close of the meetings I would sometimes approach people who

had listened to the message and ask them this simple question: “Are you a Christian?” Many times I would receive answers such as, “I think so,” or “I hope so,” or “I try to be,” or “I don’t know.” All who give answers like these betray plainly one fact: their faith is not built upon the one sure foundation of a direct, personal knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Suppose I were to put that same question to you: Are you a Christian? What kind of answer would you be able to give?

One final word of advice from Job:

Now acquaint yourself with Him, and be at peace;
Thereby good will come to you.

—JOB 22:21

Chapter Two

HOW TO BUILD ON THE FOUNDATION

ONCE WE HAVE laid in our own lives the foundation of a personal encounter with Christ, how can we continue to build upon this foundation?

The answer to this question is found in the well-known parable about the wise man and the foolish man, each of whom built a house.

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. Now everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.

—MATTHEW 7:24–27

Notice that the difference between these men did not lie in the tests to which their houses were subjected. Each man's house had to endure the storm—the wind, the rain, the floods. Christianity has never offered anyone a storm-free passage to heaven. On the contrary, we are warned that “we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

Any road sign posted “To Heaven” that bypasses tribulation is a deception. It will not lead to the promised destination.

What, then, was the real difference between the two men and their houses? The wise man built upon a foundation of rock, the foolish man upon a foundation of sand. The wise man built in such a way that his house survived the storm unmoved and secure; the foolish man built in such a way that his house could not weather the storm.

The Bible—Foundation of Faith

Just what are we to understand by this metaphor of building upon a rock? What does it mean for each of us as Christians? Christ Himself makes this very clear.

Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock.

—MATTHEW 7:24

Thus, building on the rock means hearing and doing the words of Christ.

Once the foundation—Christ the Rock—has been laid in our lives, we build on that foundation by hearing and doing the Word of God, diligently studying and applying in our lives the teaching of God’s Word. This is why Paul told the elders of the church at Ephesus:

So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up.

—ACTS 20:32

It is God’s Word, and God’s Word alone—as we hear it and do it, as we study it and apply it—that is able to build up within us a strong, secure edifice of faith, laid upon the foundation of Christ Himself.

This brings us to a subject of supreme importance in the Christian faith: the relationship between Christ and the Bible, and, hence, the relationship of each Christian to the Bible.

It is God’s Word, and God’s Word alone . . . that is able to build up within us a strong, secure edifice of faith, laid upon the foundation of Christ Himself.

Throughout its pages the Bible declares itself to be the “Word of God.” On the other hand, in a number of passages the same title—“the Word” or “the Word of God”—is given to Jesus Christ Himself. For example:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

—JOHN 1:1

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.

—JOHN 1:14

He [Christ] was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.

—REVELATION 19:13

This identity of name reveals an identity of nature. The Bible is the Word of God, and Christ is the Word of God. Each alike is a divine, authoritative, perfect revelation of God. Each agrees perfectly with the other. The Bible perfectly reveals Christ; Christ perfectly fulfills the Bible. The Bible is the written Word of God; Christ is the personal Word of God. Before His incarnation Christ was the eternal Word with the Father. In His incarnation Christ is the Word made flesh. The same Holy Spirit that reveals God through His written Word also reveals God in the Word made flesh, Jesus of Nazareth.

Proof of Discipleship

If Christ is in this sense perfectly one with the Bible, then it follows that the relationship of the believer to the Bible must be the same as his relationship to Christ. To this fact the Scriptures bear testimony in many places.

Let us turn first to John 14. In this chapter Jesus warns His disciples that He is about to be taken from them in bodily presence and that thereafter there must be a new kind of relationship between Him and them. The disciples are unable and unwilling to accept this impending change. In particular they are unable to understand how, if Christ is about to go away from them, they will still be able to see Him or have communion with Him. Christ tells them:

A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me.

—JOHN 14:19

The final phrase of that verse might also be rendered, “but you will *continue* to see Me.” Because of this statement, Judas (not Iscariot, but the other Judas) asks:

Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?

—JOHN 14:22

In other words: “Lord, if You are going away, and if the world will see You no more, how can You still manifest Yourself to us, Your disciples, but not to those who are not Your disciples? What kind of communication will You maintain with us that will not be open to the world?”

Jesus answers:

If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.

—JOHN 14:23

The key to understanding this answer is found in the phrase “he will keep My word.” The distinguishing mark between a true disciple and a person of the world is that a true disciple keeps Christ’s word.

Revealed in Christ’s answer are four facts of vital importance for every person who sincerely desires to be a Christian.

For the sake of clarity, let me first repeat the answer of Jesus:

If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.

—JOHN 14:23

Here, then, are the four vital facts:

1. Keeping God’s Word is the supreme feature that distinguishes the disciple of Christ from the rest of the world.
2. Keeping God’s Word is the supreme test of the disciple’s love for God and the supreme cause of God’s favor toward the disciple.
3. Christ manifests Himself to the disciple through God’s Word, as it is kept and obeyed.
4. The Father and the Son come into the life of the disciple and establish their enduring home with him through God’s Word.

Test of Love

Side by side with this answer of Christ’s, let me set the words of the apostle John.

He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.

—1 JOHN 2:4–5

We see from these two passages that it is impossible to overemphasize the importance of God’s Word in the believer’s life.

To summarize, the keeping of God’s Word distinguishes you as a disciple of Christ. It is the test of your love for God. It is the cause of God’s special favor toward you. It is the medium through which Christ manifests Himself to you and through which God the Father and the Son come into your life and make Their home with you.

Let me put it to you in this way.

Your attitude toward God's Word is your attitude toward God Himself. You do not love God more than You love His Word. You do not obey God more than you obey His Word. You do not honor God more than you honor His Word. You do not have more room in your heart and life for God than you have for His Word.

Do you want to know how much God means to you? Just ask yourself, "How much does God's Word mean to me?" The answer to the second question is the answer also to the first. God means as much to you as His Word means to you—just that much, and no more.

Means of Revelation

There is today a general and ever-increasing awareness among the Christian church that we have entered into the period of time foretold in Acts 2:17.

And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your young men shall see visions,
Your old men shall dream dreams.

I am humbly grateful to God that in recent years I have been privileged to experience and observe firsthand outpourings of the Spirit in five different continents—Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, Australia—where every detail of this prophecy has been enacted and repeated many times over. As a consequence, I believe firmly in the scriptural manifestation in these days of all nine gifts of the Holy Spirit; I believe that God speaks to His believing people through prophecies, visions, dreams, and other forms of supernatural revelation.

Nevertheless, I hold most firmly that the Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative means by which God speaks to His people, reveals Himself to His people, guides and directs His people. I hold that all other forms of revelation must be carefully proved by reference to the Scriptures and accepted only insofar as they accord with the doctrines, precepts, practices, and examples set forth in the Scriptures. We are told:

Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good.

—1 THESSALONIANS 5:19–21

It is wrong, therefore, to quench any genuine manifestation of the Holy Spirit. It is wrong to despise any prophecy given through the Holy Spirit. On

the other hand, it is vitally necessary to test any manifestation of the Spirit, or any prophecy, by reference to the standard of the Scriptures and thereafter to hold fast—to accept, to retain—only those manifestations or prophecies that are in full accord with this divine standard. Again, in Isaiah we are warned:

To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

—ISAIAH 8:20

Thus the Scripture—the Word of God—is the supreme standard by which all else must be judged and tested. No doctrine, no practice, no prophecy, no revelation is to be accepted if it is not in full accord with the Word of God. No person, no group, no organization, no church has authority to change, override, or depart from the Word of God. In whatever respect or whatever degree any person, group, organization, or church departs from the Word of God, in that respect and in that degree they are in darkness. *There is no light in them.*

We are living in a time when it is increasingly necessary to emphasize the supremacy of the Scripture over every other source of revelation or doctrine. We have already made reference to the great worldwide outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days and to the various supernatural manifestations that will accompany this outpouring.

However, the Scripture also warns us that, side by side with this increased activity and manifestation of the Holy Spirit, there will be a parallel increase in the activity of demonic forces, which always seek to oppose God's people and God's purposes in the earth.

Speaking about this same period of time, Christ Himself warns us:

Then if anyone says to you, "Look, here is the Christ!" or "There!" do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand.

—MATTHEW 24:23-25

In the same way, the apostle Paul warns us:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

—1 TIMOTHY 4:1-3

Paul here warns us that in these days there will be a great increase in the propagation of false doctrines and cults and that the unseen cause behind this will be the activity of deceiving spirits and demons. As examples, he mentions religious doctrines and practices that impose unnatural and unscriptural forms of asceticism in regard to diet and to the normal marriage relationship. Paul indicates that the safeguard against being deceived by these forms of religious error is to *believe and know the truth*—that is, the truth of God's Word.

**It is not God's plan that the Word should ever
work apart from the Spirit or the Spirit apart
from the Word.**

By this divine standard of truth we are enabled to detect and to reject all forms of satanic error and deception. But for the people who profess religion, without sound faith and knowledge of what the Scripture teaches, these are indeed perilous days.

We need to lay hold upon one great guiding principle established in the Scripture. It is this: God's Word and God's Spirit should always work together in perfect unity and harmony. We should never divorce the Word from the Spirit or the Spirit from the Word. It is not God's plan that the Word should ever work apart from the Spirit or the Spirit apart from the Word.

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.

—PSALM 33:6

The word here translated "breath" is actually the normal Hebrew word for "spirit." However, the use of the word "breath" suggests a beautiful picture of the working of God's Spirit. As God's Word goes out of His mouth, so His Spirit—which is His breath—goes with it.

On our human level, each time we open our mouths to speak a word, our breath necessarily goes out together with the word. So it is also with God. As God's Word goes forth, His breath—that is, His Spirit—goes with it. In this way God's Word and God's Spirit are always together, perfectly united in one single divine operation.

We see this fact illustrated, as the psalmist reminds us, in the account of Creation. In Genesis we read:

The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

—GENESIS 1:2

In the next verse we read:

Then God said, “Let there be light.”

—GENESIS 1:3

That is, God’s Word went forth; God pronounced the word *light*. And as the Word and the Spirit of God were thus united, creation took place, light came into being, and God’s purpose was fulfilled.

What was true of that great act of creation is true also of the life of each individual. God’s Word and God’s Spirit united in our lives contain all the creative authority and power of God Himself. Through them God will supply every need and will work out His perfect will and plan for us. But if we divorce these two from one another—seeking the Spirit without the Word, or studying the Word apart from the Spirit—we go astray and miss God’s plan.

To seek the manifestations of the Spirit apart from the Word will always end in foolishness, fanaticism, and error. To profess the Word without the quickening of the Spirit results only in dead, powerless orthodoxy and religious formalism.

Chapter Three

THE AUTHORITY OF GOD'S WORD

IN OUR STUDY of this subject, let us turn first to the words of Christ Himself. He is here speaking to the Jews and is justifying the claim that He has made, and that the Jews had contested, that He is the Son of God. In support of His claim, Christ quotes from the Psalms in the Old Testament, which He designates by the phrase "your law." Here is what He says:

Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, "You are gods"?' If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?"

—JOHN 10:34–36

In this reply Jesus makes use of the two titles that have ever since been used more than all others by His followers to designate the Bible. The first of these titles is "the Word of God"; the second is "the Scripture." It will be profitable to consider what each of these two main titles has to tell us about the nature of the Bible.

When Jesus called the Bible "the Word of God," He indicated that the truths revealed in it do not have their origin with men, but with God. Though many different men have been used in various ways to make the Bible available to the world, they are all merely instruments or channels. In no case did the message or the revelation of the Bible originate with men, but always and only with God Himself.

The Bible—God's Written Word

On the other hand, when Jesus used the second title, "the Scripture," He indicated a divinely appointed limitation of the Bible. The phrase "the Scripture" means literally "that which is written." The Bible does not contain the entire knowledge or purpose of Almighty God in every aspect or detail. It does not even contain all the divinely inspired messages that God has ever given through human instruments. This is proved by the fact that the Bible itself refers in many places to the utterances of prophets whose

words are not recorded in the Bible.

We see, therefore, that the Bible, though completely true and authoritative, is also highly selective. Its message is intended primarily for the human race. It is expressed in words that human beings can understand. Its central theme and purpose are the spiritual welfare of man. It reveals primarily the nature and consequences of sin and the way of deliverance from sin and its consequences through faith in Christ.

Let us now take one more brief look at the words of Jesus in John 10:35. Not merely does He set His personal seal of approval upon the Bible's two main titles—"the Word of God" and "the Scripture"—He also sets His seal of approval quite clearly upon the Bible's claim to complete authority, for He says, "...and the Scripture cannot be broken."

This short phrase, "cannot be broken," contains within it every claim for supreme and divine authority that can ever be made on behalf of the Bible. Volumes of controversy may be written either for or against the Bible, but in the last resort Jesus has said all that is necessary in five simple words: "the Scripture cannot be broken."

When we give proper weight to the Bible's claim that the men associated with it were in every case merely instruments or channels and that every message and revelation in it has its origin with God Himself, there remains no logical or reasonable ground for rejecting the Bible's claim to complete authority. We are living in days when men can launch satellites into space and then, by means of invisible forces such as radio, radar, or electronics, control the course of these satellites at distances of thousands or millions of miles, can maintain communication with them, and can receive communication from them.

If men can achieve such results as these, then only blind prejudice—and that of a most unscientific character—would deny the possibility that God could create human beings with mental and spiritual faculties such that He could control or direct them, maintain communication with them, and receive communication from them. The Bible asserts that this is in fact what God has done and still continues to do.

The discoveries and inventions of modern science, so far from discrediting the claims of the Bible, make it easier for honest and open-minded people to picture the kind of relationship between God and men that made the Bible possible.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit

The Bible indicates plainly that there is one supreme, invisible influence by which God did in fact control, direct, and communicate with the spirits and

minds of the men by whom the Bible was written. This invisible influence is the Holy Spirit—God’s own Spirit. For example, the apostle Paul says:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

—2 TIMOTHY 3:16

The word here translated “by inspiration” means literally “inbreathed of God” and is directly connected with the word *Spirit*. In other words, the Spirit of God—the Holy Spirit—was the invisible, but inerrant, influence who controlled and directed all those who wrote the various books of the Bible.

This is stated perhaps more plainly still by the apostle Peter.

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation.

—2 PETER 1:20

In other words, as we have already explained, in no case does the message or revelation of the Bible originate with man, but always with God.

Then Peter goes on to explain just how this took place.

For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

—2 PETER 1:21

The Greek word translated “moved by” means more literally “borne along by,” or we might say, “directed in their course by.” In other words, just as men today control the course of their satellites in space by the interplay of radio and electronics, so God controlled the men who wrote the Bible by the interplay of His divine Spirit with the spiritual and mental faculties of man. In the face of contemporary scientific evidence, to deny the possibility of God’s doing this is merely to give expression to prejudice.

**The complete accuracy of the divine message in
the Scriptures is due to the perfect operation
of the Holy Spirit.**

In the Old Testament the same truth of divine inspiration is presented to us in another picture, taken from an activity that goes much further back into human history than the contemporary launching of satellites into space. The psalmist David says:

The words of the LORD are pure words,
Like silver tried in a furnace of earth,
Purified seven times.

—PSALM 12:6

The picture is taken from the process of purifying silver in a furnace or oven built of clay. (Such clay ovens are still used for various purposes among the Arabs today.) The clay furnace represents the human element; the silver represents the divine message that is to be conveyed through the human channel; the fire, which ensures the absolute purity of the silver, that is, the absolute accuracy of the message, represents the Holy Spirit. The phrase “seven times” indicates—as the number seven does in many passages of the Bible—the absolute perfection of the Holy Spirit’s work.

Thus, the whole picture assures us that the complete accuracy of the divine message in the Scriptures is due to the perfect operation of the Holy Spirit, overruling all the frailty of human clay and purging all the dross of human error from the flawless silver of God’s message to man.

Eternal, Authoritative

Probably no character in the Old Testament had a clearer understanding than the psalmist David of the truth and authority of God’s Word. David writes:

Forever, O LORD,
Your word is settled in heaven.

—PSALM 119:89

Here David emphasizes that the Bible is not the product of time but of eternity. It contains the eternal mind and counsel of God, formed before the beginning of time or the foundation of the world. Out of eternity it has been projected through human channels into this world of time, but when time and the world pass away, the mind and counsel of God revealed through Scripture will still stand unmoved and unchanged. The same thought is expressed by Christ Himself.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

—MATTHEW 24:35

Again, David says:

The entirety of Your word is truth,
And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever.

—PSALM 119:160

In the last century or two, persistent criticism and attack have been directed against the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. However, by far the greatest part of this attack has always been focused on the Book of Genesis and the next four books that follow it. These first five books of the Bible, known as the Pentateuch or Torah, are attributed to the authorship of Moses.

It is remarkable, therefore, that nearly three thousand years before these attacks against the Pentateuch were conceived in the minds of men, David had already given the Holy Spirit's testimony to the faith of God's believing people throughout all ages.

The entirety of Your word is truth.

—PSALM 119:160

In other words, the Bible is true from Genesis 1:1 right on through to the very last verse of Revelation.

Christ and His apostles, like all believing Jews of their time, accepted the absolute truth and authority of all the Old Testament Scriptures, including the five books of the Pentateuch.

In the account of Christ's temptation by Satan in the wilderness, we read that Christ answered each temptation of Satan by direct quotation from the Old Testament Scriptures. (See Matthew 4:1–10.) Three times He commenced His answer with the phrase "It is written..." Each time He was quoting directly from the fifth book of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy. It is a remarkable fact that not only Christ, but also Satan, accepted the absolute authority of this book.

In the Sermon on the Mount Christ said:

Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. [This phrase 'the Law or the Prophets' was generally used to designate the Old Testament Scriptures as a whole.] I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

—MATTHEW 5:17–18

The word *jot* is the English form of the name of the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, roughly corresponding in size and shape to an inverted comma in modern English script. The word *tittle* indicates a little curl or horn, smaller in size than a comma, added at the corner of certain letters in the Hebrew alphabet to distinguish them from other letters very similar in shape.

Thus, what Christ is saying, in effect, is that the original text of the Hebrew Scriptures is so accurate and authoritative that not even one portion of the script smaller in size than a comma can be altered or removed. It is scarcely possible to conceive how Christ could have used any form of speech that would have more thoroughly endorsed the absolute accuracy and authority of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Consistently throughout His earthly teaching ministry He maintained the same attitude toward the Old Testament Scriptures. For instance, we read that when the Pharisees raised a question about marriage and divorce, Christ answered by referring them to the opening chapters of Genesis. (See Matthew 19:3–9.) He introduced His answer by the question:

Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning “made them male and female”?

—MATTHEW 19:4

The phrase “at the beginning” constituted a direct reference to the Book of Genesis since this is its Hebrew title.

The original text of the Hebrew Scriptures is so accurate and authoritative that not even one portion of the script smaller in size than a comma can be altered or removed.

Again, when the Sadducees raised a question about the resurrection from the dead, Christ answered them by referring to the account of Moses at the burning bush in the Book of Exodus. (See Matthew 22:31–32.) As with the Pharisees, He replied in the form of a question:

Have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”?

—MATTHEW 22:31–32

Christ here quotes from Exodus 3:6. But in quoting these words recorded by Moses nearly fifteen centuries earlier, Christ said to the Sadducees of His own day, “Have you not read what was spoken to you by God?” Note that

phrase “spoken to you by God.” Christ did not regard these writings of Moses as merely a historical document of the past, but rather as a living, up-to-date, authoritative message direct from God to the people of His own day. The passage of fifteen centuries had not deprived the record of Moses of its vitality, its accuracy, or its authority.

Not merely did Christ accept the absolute accuracy of the Old Testament Scriptures in all His teaching, He also acknowledged their absolute authority and control over the whole course of His own earthly life. From His birth to His death and resurrection there was one supreme, controlling principle, which was expressed in the phrase “that it might be fulfilled.” That which was to be fulfilled was in every case some relevant Scripture passage of the Old Testament. For example, the Bible specifically records that each of the following incidents in the earthly life of Jesus took place in fulfillment of Old Testament Scriptures:

- His birth of a virgin
- His birth at Bethlehem
- His flight into Egypt
- His dwelling at Nazareth
- His anointing by the Holy Spirit
- His ministry in Galilee
- His healing of the sick
- The rejection of His teaching and His miracles by the Jews
- His use of parables
- His betrayal by a friend
- His being forsaken by His disciples
- His being hated without a cause
- His being condemned with criminals
- His garments being parted and divided by lot
- His being offered vinegar for His thirst
- His body being pierced without His bones being broken
- His rising from the dead on the third day.

The entire earthly life of Jesus was directed in every aspect by the absolute authority of the Old Testament Scriptures. When we set this fact side by side with His own unquestioning acceptance of the Old Testament Scriptures in all His teaching, we are left with only one logical conclusion: if the Old Testament Scriptures are not an absolutely accurate and authoritative revelation from God, then Jesus Christ Himself was either deceived or He was a deceiver.

Coherent, Complete, All-Sufficient

Let us now consider the authority claimed for the New Testament.

We must first observe the remarkable fact that, so far as we know, Christ Himself never set down a single word in writing—with the exception of one occasion when He wrote on the ground in the presence of a woman taken in adultery.

Nevertheless, He explicitly commanded His disciples to transmit the record of His ministry and His teaching to all nations on earth.

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.

—MATTHEW 28:19–20

Previously He had said:

Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes.

—MATTHEW 23:34

The word *scribes* means “writers,” that is, those who set down religious teaching in written form. It is therefore clear that Jesus intended the record of His ministry and teaching to be set down by His disciples in permanent form.

Furthermore, Jesus made all necessary provisions for the absolute accuracy of all that He intended His disciples to put down in writing, for He promised to send the Holy Spirit to them for this purpose.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

—JOHN 14:26

A further, similar promise is contained in John 16:13–15. Notice that in these words Christ made provision both for past and for future, that is, both for the accurate recording of those things that the disciples had already seen and heard and also for the accurate imparting of the new truths that the Holy Spirit would thereafter reveal to them. The past is provided for in the phrase “He will . . . bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26). The future is provided for in the phrase “He will teach you all things” (v. 26) and again, in John 16:13, “He will guide you into all truth.”

We see, therefore, that the accuracy and authority of the New Testament, like that of the Old Testament, depend not upon human observation, memory, or understanding, but upon the teaching, guidance, and control of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, the apostle Paul says, "All scripture [Old Testament and New Testament alike] is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16).

We find that the apostles themselves clearly understood this and laid claim to this authority in their writings. For example, Peter writes:

Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle . . . that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior.

—2 PETER 3:1–2

Here Peter sets the Scriptures of the Old Testament prophets and the written commandments of Christ's apostles side by side, as being of precisely equal authority. Peter also acknowledges the divine authority of the writings of Paul, for he says:

And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.

—2 PETER 3:15–16

The phrase "the rest of the Scriptures" indicates that even in the lifetime of Paul the other apostles acknowledged that his epistles possessed the full authority of Scripture. Yet Paul himself had never known Jesus in His earthly ministry. Therefore, the accuracy and authority of Paul's teaching depended solely upon the supernatural inspiration and revelation of the Holy Spirit.

The same applies to Luke, who never received the title of apostle. Nevertheless, in the preamble to his Gospel, he states that he "had perfect understanding of all things from the very first" (Luke 1:3). The Greek word translated "from the very first" means literally "from above."

In John 3:3, where Jesus speaks of being "born again," it is the same Greek word which is translated "again" or "from above." In each of these passages the word indicates the direct, supernatural intervention and operation of the Holy Spirit.

Thus we find, on careful examination, that the claim to absolute accuracy

and authority of both Old and New Testaments alike depends not on the variable and fallible faculties of human beings, but on the divine, supernatural guidance, revelation, and control of the Holy Spirit. Interpreted together in this way, the Old and New Testaments confirm and complement each other and constitute a coherent, complete, and all-sufficient revelation of God.

We have also seen that there is nothing in this total view of the Scriptures that is inconsistent with logic, science, or common sense. On the contrary, there is much in all three to confirm such a view and render it easy to believe.

Chapter Four

INITIAL EFFECTS OF GOD'S WORD

WE SHALL NOW examine the practical effects that the Bible claims to produce in those who receive it. In Hebrews 4:12 we are told that “the word of God is living and powerful.”

The Greek word translated “powerful” is the one from which we obtain the English word *energetic*. The picture conveyed to us is one of intense, vibrant energy and activity.

Similarly, Jesus Himself says, “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).

Again, the apostle Paul tells the Christians in Thessalonica:

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

—1 THESSALONIANS 2:13

Thus we see that God's Word cannot be reduced merely to sounds in the air or marks on a sheet of paper. On the contrary, God's Word is life; it is Spirit; it is alive; it is active; it is energetic; it works effectively in those who believe it.

Response Determines Effect

However, the Bible also makes it plain that the manner and the degree in which it works in any given instance are decided by the response of those who hear it. For this reason James says:

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness [naughtiness], and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

—JAMES 1:21

Before the Word of God can be received into the soul with saving effect, there are certain things that must be laid aside. The two things James specifies are “filthiness” and “wickedness,” or naughtiness. Filthiness denotes a perverse

delight in that which is licentious and impure. This attitude closes the mind and heart against the saving influence of God's Word.

On the other hand, naughtiness particularly suggests the bad behavior of a child. We call a child "naughty" when he refuses to accept instruction or correction from his senior but argues and answers back. This attitude is often found in the unregenerate soul toward God. Several passages of Scripture refer to this attitude.

But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God?

—ROMANS 9:20

Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? He who rebukes God, let him answer it.

—JOB 40:2

This attitude, like that of filthiness, closes the heart and mind to the beneficial effects of God's Word.

The opposite of filthiness and naughtiness is described by James as meekness. Meekness carries with it the ideas of quietness, humility, sincerity, patience, openness of heart and mind. These characteristics are often associated with what the Bible calls "the fear of the Lord"; that is, an attitude of reverence and respect toward God. Thus we read the following description in Psalms of the man who is able to receive benefit and blessing from the instruction of God through His Word.

Good and upright is the LORD;
Therefore He teaches sinners in the way.
The humble He guides in justice,
And the humble He teaches His way....
Who is the man that fears the LORD?
Him shall He teach in the way He chooses....
The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him,
And He will show them His covenant.

—PSALM 25:8-9, 12, 14

We see here that meekness and the fear of the Lord are the two attitudes necessary in those who desire to receive instruction and blessing from God through His Word. These two attitudes are the opposites of those that James describes as "filthiness" and "naughtiness."

Thus we find that God's Word can produce quite different effects in different people and that these effects are decided by the reactions of those who hear it. For this reason we read in Hebrews 4:12 not merely that God's Word

is “alive” and “active,” but also that it “is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” In other words, God’s Word brings out into the open the inward nature and character of those who hear it and distinguishes sharply between the different types of hearers.

In like manner Paul describes the dividing and revealing character of the gospel.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

—1 CORINTHIANS 1:18

There is no difference in the message preached; the message is the same to all men. The difference lies in the reaction of those who hear. For those who react in one way, the message appears to be mere foolishness; for those who react in the opposite way, the message becomes the saving power of God actually experienced in their lives.

**God’s Word brings out into the open the
inward nature and character of those who hear it
and distinguishes sharply between the
different types of hearers.**

This leads us to yet another fact about the Word of God, which is stated in that key verse Hebrews 4:12. Not only is the Word of God alive and active, not only is it a discerner or revealer of the thoughts and intents of the heart, but it is also “sharper than any two-edged sword.” That is, it divides all those who hear into two classes—those who reject it and call it foolishness, and those who receive it and find in it the saving power of God.

It was in this sense that Christ said:

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to “set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”

—MATTHEW 10:34–35

The sword that Christ came to send upon earth is that which John saw proceeding out of Christ’s mouth—the sharp, two-edged sword of God’s Word. (See Revelation 1:16.) This sword, as it goes forth through the earth, divides even between members of the same household, severing the closest of earthly bonds, its effect determined by the response of each individual.

Faith

Turning now to those who receive God's Word with meekness and sincerity, with openness of heart and mind, let us examine in order the various effects it produces.

The first of these effects is faith.

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

—ROMANS 10:17

There are three successive stages in the spiritual process here described:

1. God's Word
2. Hearing
3. Faith

God's Word does not immediately produce faith, but only hearing. Hearing may be described as an attitude of aroused interest and attention, a sincere desire to receive and to understand the message presented. Then out of hearing there develops faith.

It is important to see that the hearing of God's Word initiates a process in the soul out of which faith develops and that this process requires a minimum period of time. This explains why there is so little faith to be found among so many professing Christians today. They never devote enough time to the hearing of God's Word to allow it to produce in them any substantial proportion of faith. If they ever devote any time at all to private devotions and the study of God's Word, the whole thing is conducted in such a hurried and haphazard way that it is all over before faith has had time to develop.

As we study how faith is produced, we also come to understand much more clearly how scriptural faith should be defined. In general conversation we use the word *faith* very freely. We speak of having faith in a doctor or faith in a medicine or faith in a newspaper or faith in a politician or political party. In scriptural terms, however, the word *faith* must be much more strictly defined. Since faith comes only from hearing God's Word, faith is always directly related to God's Word. Scriptural faith does not consist in believing anything that we ourselves may wish or please or fancy. Scriptural faith may be defined as believing that God means what He has said in His Word—that God will do what He has promised in His Word to do.

For example, David exercised this scriptural kind of faith when he said to the Lord:

And now, O LORD, the word which You have spoken concerning Your servant and concerning his house, let it be established forever, and do as You have said.

—1 CHRONICLES 17:23

Scriptural faith is expressed in those five short words: “do as You have said.”

Likewise, the Virgin Mary exercised the same kind of scriptural faith when the angel Gabriel brought her a message of promise from God, and she replied:

Let it be to me according to your word.

—LUKE 1:38

That is the secret of scriptural faith—*according to Your word*. Scriptural faith is produced within the soul by the hearing of God’s Word and is expressed by the active response of claiming the fulfillment of that which God has said.

It is important to see that the hearing of God’s Word initiates a process in the soul out of which faith develops and that this process requires a minimum period of time.

We have emphasized that faith is the first effect produced in the soul by God’s Word because faith of this kind is basic to any positive transaction between God and any human soul.

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

—HEBREWS 11:6

We see that faith is the first and indispensable response of the human soul in its approach to God.

He who comes to God must believe.

—HEBREWS 11:6

The New Birth

After faith, the next great effect produced by God's Word within the soul is that spiritual experience that is called in Scripture "the new birth" or "being born again." Thus James says concerning God:

Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

—JAMES 1:18

The born-again Christian possesses a new kind of spiritual life brought forth within him by the Word of God received by faith in his soul.

Similarly, the apostle Peter describes Christians as being "born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever" (1 Pet. 1:23).

It is a principle, both in nature and in Scripture, that the type of seed determines the type of life that is produced from the seed. A corn seed produces corn; a barley seed produces barley; an orange seed produces an orange.

So it is also in the new birth. The seed is the divine, incorruptible, eternal Word of God. The life this produces, when received by faith into the heart of the believer, is like the seed—divine, incorruptible, eternal.

It is, in fact, the very life of God Himself coming into a human soul through His Word.

John writes:

Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

—1 JOHN 3:9

John here directly relates the victorious life of the overcoming Christian to the nature of the seed that produced that life within him—that is, God's own seed—the incorruptible seed of God's Word. Because the seed is incorruptible, the life it produces is also incorruptible—that is, absolutely pure and holy.

The true Christian who has been born again of the incorruptible seed of God's Word has within him the possibility of leading a life of complete victory over sin.

However, this Scripture does not assert that a born-again Christian can never commit sin. Within every born-again Christian a completely new

nature has come into being. Paul calls this new nature “the new man” and contrasts it with “the old man”—the old, corrupt, depraved, fallen nature that dominates every person who has never been born again. (See Ephesians 4:22–24.)

There is a complete contrast between these two: the “new man” is righteous and holy; the “old man” is depraved and corrupt. The “new man,” being born of God, cannot commit sin; the “old man,” being the product of man’s rebellion and fall, cannot help committing sin.

The kind of life that any born-again Christian leads is the outcome of the interplay within him of these two natures. So long as the “old man” is kept in subjection and the “new man” exercises his proper control, there is unsullied righteousness, victory, and peace. But whenever the “old man” is allowed to reassert himself and regain his control, the inevitable consequence is failure, defeat, and sin.

We may sum up the contrast in this way: the true Christian who has been born again of the incorruptible seed of God’s Word has within him the possibility of leading a life of complete victory over sin. The unregenerate man who has never been born again has no alternative but to commit sin. He is inevitably the slave of his own corrupt, fallen nature.

Spiritual Nourishment

We have said that the new birth through God’s Word produces within the soul a completely new nature—a new kind of life. This leads us to consider the next main effect that God’s Word produces.

In every realm of life there is one unchanging law: as soon as a new life is born, the first and greatest need of that new life is nourishment to sustain it. For example, when a human baby is born, that baby may be sound and healthy in every respect, but unless it quickly receives nourishment, it will pine away and die.

The same is true in the spiritual realm. When a person is born again, the new spiritual nature produced within that person immediately requires spiritual nourishment, both to maintain life and to promote growth. The spiritual nourishment God has provided for all His born-again children is found in His own Word. God’s Word is so rich and varied that it contains nourishment adapted to every stage of spiritual development.

God’s provision for the first stages of spiritual growth is described in the First Epistle of Peter. Immediately after Peter has spoken in chapter 1 about being born again of the incorruptible seed of God’s Word, he goes on to say in chapter 2:

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.

—1 PETER 2:1–2

For newborn spiritual babes in Christ, God's appointed nourishment is the pure milk of His own Word. This milk is a necessary condition of continued life and growth.

However, there is a warning attached. In the natural order, no matter how pure and fresh milk may be, it easily becomes contaminated and spoiled if it is brought into contact with anything that is sour or rancid. The same is true spiritually. For newborn Christians to receive proper nourishment from the pure milk of God's Word, their hearts must first be thoroughly cleansed from all that is sour or rancid.

For this reason Peter warns us that we must lay aside all malice, all guile, all hypocrisy, all envy, and all evil speaking. These are the sour and rancid elements of the old life that, if not purged from our hearts, will frustrate the beneficial effects of God's Word within us and hinder our spiritual health and growth.

However, it is not the will of God that Christians should continue in spiritual infancy too long. As they begin to grow up, God's Word offers them more substantial food. When Christ was tempted by Satan to turn stones into bread, He replied:

It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

—MATTHEW 4:4

Christ here indicates that God's Word is the spiritual counterpart of bread in man's natural diet. In other words, it is the main item of diet and source of strength.

It is significant that Christ said with emphasis, "every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." In other words, Christians who wish to mature spiritually must learn to study the whole Bible, not just a few of the more familiar portions.

It is said of George Müller that he regularly read the Bible through several times each year. This explains in large measure the triumphs of his faith and the fruitfulness of his ministry. Yet there are many professing Christians and church members who scarcely know where to find in their Bibles such books as Ezra and Nehemiah or some of the minor prophets. Far less have they ever studied for themselves the messages of such books.

No wonder they continue forever in a kind of spiritual infancy. They are,

in fact, sad examples of retarded development due to inadequate diet.

Beyond milk and bread, God's Word also provides solid food. The writer of Hebrews rebuked the Hebrew believers of his day on the grounds that they had been familiar for many years with the Scriptures but had never learned to make any proper study or application of their teaching. Consequently, they were still spiritually immature and unable to help others who stood in need of spiritual teaching. This is what the writer says:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles [or elements] of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

—HEBREWS 5:12-14

What a picture of a great mass of professing Christians and church members today! They have owned a Bible and attended church for many years. Yet how little they know of what the Bible teaches! How weak and immature they are in their own spiritual experience; how little able to counsel a sinner or instruct a new convert! After so many years they are still spiritual babes, unable to digest any kind of teaching that goes beyond milk!

However, it is not necessary to remain in this condition. The writer of Hebrews tells us the remedy. It is to have our senses exercised by reason of use. The regular, systematic study of the whole of God's Word will develop and mature our spiritual faculties.

Chapter Five

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL EFFECTS OF GOD'S WORD

IN THE PREVIOUS study we discovered the following three effects of God's Word:

1. God's Word produces faith, and faith, in turn, is directly related to God's Word because faith is believing and acting upon what God has said in His Word.
2. God's Word, received as incorruptible seed into a believer's heart, produces the new birth—a new spiritual nature created within the believer and called in the Scriptures “the new man.”
3. God's Word is the divinely appointed spiritual nourishment with which the believer must regularly feed the new nature within him if he is to grow into a healthy, strong, mature Christian.

Physical Healing

God's Word is so varied and wonderful in its working that it provides not only spiritual health and strength for the soul but also physical health and strength for the body. Let us turn first to Psalms.

Fools, because of their transgression,
And because of their iniquities, were afflicted.
Their soul abhorred all manner of food,
And they drew near to the gates of death.
Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble,
And He saved them out of their distresses.
He sent His word and healed them,
And delivered them from their destructions.

—PSALM 107:17-20

The psalmist gives us a picture of men so desperately sick that they have lost all appetite for food and are lying right at death's door. In their extremity they cry out to the Lord, and He sends them that which they cry for—healing and deliverance. By what means does He send these? By His Word. For the psalmist says:

He sent His word and healed them,
And delivered them from their destructions.

—PSALM 107:20

Side by side with this passage in Psalm 107 we may set the passage in Isaiah 55:11 where God says:

So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please,
And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

In Psalm 107:20 we read that God sent His Word to heal and deliver; in Isaiah 55:11 God says that His Word will accomplish the thing for which He sent it. Thus God guarantees that He will provide healing through His Word.

This truth of physical healing through God's Word is even more fully stated in Proverbs, where God says:

My son, give attention to my words;
Incline your ear to my sayings.
Do not let them depart from your eyes:
Keep them in the midst of your heart;
For they are life to those who find them,
And health to all their flesh.

—PROVERBS 4:20-22

What promise of physical healing could be more all-inclusive than that? "Health to all their flesh." Every part of our physical frame is included in this phrase. Nothing is omitted. Furthermore, in the margin of the 1611 edition of the King James Version, the alternative reading for "health" is "medicine." The same Hebrew word includes both shades of meaning. Thus God has committed Himself to providing complete physical healing and health.

Notice the introductory phrase at the beginning of verse 20: "My son." This indicates that God is speaking to His own believing children. When a Syro-Phoenician woman came to Christ to plead for the healing of her daughter, Christ replied to her request by saying:

It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs.

—MATTHEW 15:26

By these words Christ indicated that healing is the children's bread; in other words, it is part of God's appointed daily portion for all His children. It is not a luxury for which they have to make special pleas and that may or may not be granted them. No, it is their "bread," part of their daily provision from their heavenly Father. This agrees exactly with the passage we read in Proverbs 4, where God's promise of perfect healing and health is addressed to every believing child of God. Both in Psalm 107 and in Proverbs 4 the means by which God provides healing is His Word. This is one further example of the vital truth that we stressed earlier in this series: that God Himself is in His Word and that it is through His Word that He comes into our lives.

As we consider the claim made in Proverbs 4:20–22 that God's Word is medicine for all our flesh, we might call these three verses God's great "medicine bottle." They contain a medicine such as was never compounded on earth—one medicine guaranteed to cure all diseases.

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it is through His Word that
He comes into our lives.**

However, when a doctor prescribes a medicine, he normally ensures that the directions for taking it are written clearly on the bottle. This implies that no cure can be expected unless the medicine is taken regularly, according to the directions. The same is true with God's "medicine" in Proverbs. The directions are "on the bottle," and no cure is guaranteed if the directions are not followed.

What are these directions? They are fourfold.

1. "Give attention to my words."
2. "Incline your ear."
3. "Do not let them depart from your eyes."
4. "Keep them in the midst of your heart."

Let us analyze these directions a little more closely. The first direction is "give attention to my words." As we read God's Word, we need to give it close and careful attention. We need to focus our understanding upon it. We need to give it free, unhindered access to our whole inward being. So often we read God's Word with divided attention. Half our mind is occupied with what we read; the other half is occupied with those things Jesus called "the cares of this

life.” We read some verses, or perhaps even a chapter or two, but at the end we have no clear impression of what we have read. Our attention has wandered.

Taken in this way, God’s Word will not produce the effects God intended. When reading the Bible, it is well to do what Jesus recommended when He spoke of prayer; that is, to enter our closet and shut the door. We must shut ourselves in with God and shut out the things of the world.

The second direction on God’s medicine bottle is “incline your ear.” The inclined ear indicates humility. It is the opposite of being proud and stiff-necked. We must be teachable. We must be willing to let God teach us. In Psalm 78:41 the psalmist speaks of Israel’s conduct as they wandered through the wilderness from Egypt to Canaan, and he brings this charge against them: they limited the Holy One of Israel.

By their stubbornness and unbelief they set limits to what they would allow God to do for them. Many professing Christians do just the same today. They do not approach the Bible with an open mind or a teachable spirit. They are full of prejudices or preconceptions—very often instilled by the particular sect or denomination with which they are associated—and they are not willing to accept any revelation or teaching from the Scriptures that goes beyond, or contrary to, their own set thoughts. Jesus charged the religious leaders of His day with this fault.

Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.... And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.

—MATTHEW 15:6, 9

The apostle Paul had been a prisoner of religious prejudices and traditions, but through the revelation of Christ on the Damascus road he was set free from them. Thereafter we find him saying in Romans 3:4:

Let God be true but every man a liar.

If we wish to receive the full benefit of God’s Word, we must learn to take the same attitude.

The third direction on God’s medicine bottle is “do not let them depart from your eyes,” with the word *them* referring to God’s words and sayings. The late evangelist Smith Wigglesworth once said, “The trouble with many Christians is that they have a spiritual squint: with one eye they are looking at the promises of the Lord, and with the other eye they are looking in some other direction.”

In order to receive the benefits of physical healing promised in God’s Word, it is necessary to keep both eyes fixed unwaveringly on the Lord’s promises. One

mistake many Christians make is to look away from God's promises to the case of some other Christian who has failed to receive healing. As they do this, their own faith wavers, and they too fail to receive healing.

He who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

—JAMES 1:6–8

A helpful verse to remember in such a situation is this one:

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

—DEUTERONOMY 29:29

The reason why some Christians fail to receive healing remains a secret, known only to God and not revealed to man. We do not need to be concerned with such secrets as this. Rather we need to concern ourselves with those things that are revealed: the clear statements and promises of God given to us in His Word. The things thus revealed in God's Word belong to us and to our children forever; they are our heritage as believers; they are our inalienable right. And they belong to us "that we may do them," that is, that we may act upon them in faith. When we do, we prove them true in our experience.

The first direction spoke of "attending"; the second spoke of the "inclined ear"; the third spoke of the "focused eyes." The fourth direction on God's medicine bottle concerns the heart, the inward center of the human personality, for it says "keep them in the midst of your heart." Proverbs emphasizes the decisive influence of the heart in human experience.

Keep your heart with all diligence,
For out of it spring the issues of life.

—PROVERBS 4:23

In other words, what is in our hearts controls the whole course of our lives and all that we experience.

If we receive God's words with careful attention—if we admit them regularly through both the ear and the eye so that they occupy and control our hearts—then we find them to be exactly what God has promised: both life to our souls and health to our flesh.

During World War II, while working with the medical services in North Africa, I became sick with a condition of the skin and nerves for which medi-

cal science, in that climate and those conditions, could provide no cure. I spent more than one year in the hospital, receiving every kind of treatment available. For more than four months at a stretch I was confined to bed. Eventually, I was discharged from the hospital at my own request, uncured.

**If we receive God's words with careful attention . . .
then we find them to be exactly what God has promised:
both life to our souls and health to our flesh.**

I decided to seek no further medical treatment but to put the promises of God in Proverbs 4:20–22 to the test in my own case. Three times a day I went apart by myself, shut myself in with God and His Word, prayed, and asked God to make His Word to me what He had promised it should be—medicine to all my flesh.

The climate, the diet, and all other external circumstances were as unfavorable as they could be. Indeed, many healthy men all around me were falling sick. Nevertheless, through God's Word alone, without recourse to any other means of any kind, I received within a short time a complete and permanent cure.

Let me add that I am in no sense criticizing or belittling medical science. I am grateful for all the good that medical science accomplishes. Indeed, I myself was working with the medical services. But the power of medical science is limited; the power of God's Word is unlimited.

Many Christians of different denominational backgrounds have testimonies similar to mine. I received a letter from a Presbyterian lady who was asked to give a word of testimony in a service in which there were a number of sick people to be prayed for. While this lady was testifying and actually quoting the words of Proverbs 4:20–22, another lady in the seat next to hers, who had been suffering excruciating pain from a crushed disk in her neck, was instantly healed—without any prayer being offered—simply through listening with faith to God's Word.

Later, I devoted a week on my radio Bible teaching program to this theme of God's medicine bottle. A lady listener suffering from chronic eczema decided to take the medicine according to the "directions." Three months later she wrote to tell me that for the first time in twenty-five years her skin was completely free from eczema. The words of Psalm 107:20 are still being fulfilled today.

He sent His word and healed them,
And delivered them from their destructions.

Christians who testify today of the healing power of God's Word can say, as Christ Himself said to Nicodemus:

Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen.

—JOHN 3:11

For those who need healing and deliverance:

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good;
Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!

—PSALM 34:8

Taste this medicine of God's Word for yourself! See how it works! It is not like so many earthly medicines, bitter and unpalatable. Nor does it work like so many modern drugs, bringing relief to one organ of the body but causing a reaction that impairs some other organ. No, God's Word is altogether good, altogether beneficial. When received according to His direction, it brings life and health to our whole being.

Mental Illumination

In the area of the mind, also, the effect of God's Word is unique.

The entrance of Your words gives light;
It gives understanding to the simple.

—PSALM 119:130

The psalmist speaks of two effects produced in the mind by God's Word: "light" and "understanding."

In the world today education is probably more highly prized and more universally sought after than at any previous period in man's history. Nevertheless, secular education is not the same as "light" or "understanding." Nor is it any substitute for them. Indeed, there is no substitute for light. Nothing in the whole universe can do what light does.

So it is with God's Word in the human mind. Nothing else can do in the human mind what God's Word does, and nothing else can take the place of God's Word.

Secular education is a good thing, but it can be misused. A highly educated mind is a fine instrument—just like a sharp knife. But a knife can be misused. One man can take a sharp knife and use it to cut up food for his family. Another man may take a similar knife and use it to kill a fellow human being.

So it is with secular education. It is a wonderful thing, but it can be mis-used. Divorced from the illumination of God's Word, it can become extremely dangerous. A nation or civilization that concentrates on secular education but gives no place to God's Word is simply forging instruments for its own destruction. The history of recent developments in the technique of nuclear fission is one among many historical examples of this fact.

On the other hand, God's Word reveals to man those things that he can never discover by his own intellect: the reality of God the Creator and Redeemer; the true purpose of existence; man's own inner nature; his origin and his destiny. In the light of this revelation, life takes on an entirely new meaning. With a mind thus illuminated, a man sees himself as part of a single comprehensive plan that spans the universe. Finding his place in this divine plan, he achieves a sense of self-worth and personal fulfillment that satisfies his deepest longings.

The effect of God's Word upon the mind, no less than its effect upon the body, has been made real for me in personal experience. I was privileged to receive the highest form of education that Britain had to offer in my generation. This climaxed with seven years at Cambridge University, studying philosophy, both ancient and modern. Always I was seeking something that would give real meaning and purpose to life. Academically I was successful, but inwardly I was still frustrated and unfulfilled.

**God's Word reveals to man those things
that he can never discover by his own intellect.**

Finally, as a last resort, I started to study the Bible simply as a work of philosophy. I studied it skeptically, as one who had rejected all forms of religion. Yet before many months, and before I had even reached the New Testament, the entrance of God's Word had imparted to me the light of salvation, the assurance of sins forgiven, the consciousness of inward peace, and eternal life. I had found what I had been seeking: the real meaning and purpose of life.

It is appropriate to close this section by returning to Hebrews 4:12.

For the word of God is living and powerful [or energetic], and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

This confirms and sums up the conclusions we have reached concerning God's Word. There is no area of the human personality that God's Word does

not penetrate. It reaches right down into the spirit and soul, the heart and the mind, and even into the innermost core of our physical body, the joints and the marrow.

In perfect accord with this, we have seen in this and in the previous chapter that God's Word, implanted as a seed in the heart, brings forth eternal life. Thereafter it provides spiritual nourishment for the new life thus brought forth. Received into our bodies it produces perfect health, and received into our minds it produces mental illumination and understanding.

Chapter Six

VICTORIOUS EFFECTS OF GOD'S WORD

Victory Over Sin

We have already remarked that probably no character in the Old Testament had a clearer vision of the authority and power of God's Word than the psalmist David. For an introduction to our present subject, victory over sin and Satan, we may turn once again to the words of David.

Your word I have hidden in my heart,
That I might not sin against You.

—PSALM 119:11

The Hebrew word here translated “hidden” means, more exactly, “to store up as a treasure.” David did not mean he had hidden God's Word away so that its presence could never be detected. Rather he meant he had stored up God's Word in the safest place, reserved for things he treasured most, so he might have it available for immediate use in every time of need.

In Psalm 17:4 David again expresses the keeping power of God's Word.

Concerning the works of men,
By the word of Your lips,
I have kept away from the paths of the destroyer.

Here is a word of direction concerning our participation in “the works of men”—human activities and social interaction. Some of these activities are safe, wholesome, acceptable to God; others are dangerous to the soul and contain the hidden snares of the destroyer. (“The destroyer” is one of many names in Scripture for the devil.) How are we to distinguish between those that are safe and wholesome and those that are spiritually dangerous? The answer is, by the application of God's Word.

One often hears questions such as these: Is it right for a Christian to dance? To smoke? To gamble? And so on. The answer to all such questions must be decided not by accepted social practice, nor by accepted church tradition, but by the application of God's Word.

For instance, I remember that a group of Christian African women students

once asked me, as a Christian minister, if there was any harm in their attending dances at the college where they were being trained as teachers. In reply I did not offer them my own personal opinion or the regulations laid down by a mission board. Instead I asked them to turn with me to two passages in the Bible.

Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

—1 CORINTHIANS 10:31

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

—COLOSSIANS 3:17

I pointed out that these two passages of Scripture contain two great principles that decide and direct all that we do as Christians. First, we must do all things to the glory of God. Second, we must do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God by Him. Therefore, anything that we can do to the glory of God and in the name of the Lord Jesus is good and acceptable; anything that we cannot do to the glory of God and in the name of the Lord Jesus is wrong and harmful.

I then applied these principles to the question they had asked me. I said, "If you can attend those dances to the glory of God, and if you can freely give thanks to God in the name of the Lord Jesus while you are dancing, then it is perfectly all right for you to dance. But if you cannot do your dancing in this way and upon these conditions, then it is wrong for you to dance."

Anything that we can do to the glory of God and in the name of the Lord Jesus is good and acceptable; anything that we cannot do to the glory of God and in the name of the Lord Jesus is wrong and harmful.

It was my responsibility, as I saw it, to give those young women basic scriptural principles. Thereafter it was their responsibility, not mine, to apply those principles to their particular situation.

Medical research has brought to light one very definite way in which many modern Christians, like David of old, have been kept from the paths of the destroyer by the application of God's Word.

The Scriptures teach very plainly that the body of the Christian, having been redeemed from the dominion of Satan by the blood of Christ, is a temple for the Holy Spirit to dwell in and is therefore to be kept clean and holy. For example, Paul says:

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

—1 CORINTHIANS 3:16–17

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

—1 CORINTHIANS 6:19–20

For this is the will of God, your sanctification... that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel [that is, the earthen vessel of his physical body] in sanctification and honor.

—1 THESSALONIANS 4:3–4

On the basis of these and other similar passages, many Christians have refrained from using tobacco in any form. Until fairly recently it was often suggested by unbelievers that this refusal by Christians to indulge in tobacco was merely a kind of foolish, old-fashioned fad, akin to fanaticism. However, modern medical research has demonstrated, beyond all possibility of doubt, that smoking—particularly of cigarettes—is a direct contributory cause of lung cancer. The medical associations of both the United States and Great Britain have endorsed this conclusion. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 157,000 Americans died from lung cancer in 2002. Another undisputed fact, proved by experience and endorsed by medical science, is that death through lung cancer is usually lingering and painful.

In the face of facts such as these, the refusal of Christians to smoke can no longer be dismissed as foolishness or fanaticism. If foolishness can be charged to anyone today, it is certainly not to the Christian but to the person who regularly wastes substantial sums of money to gratify a lust that greatly increases the possibility of a painful death through lung cancer. And if foolishness can be charged to the victims of this lust, surely nothing short of wickedness can be charged to those who, by every means of persuasion and modern publicity, willfully seek, for the sake of their own financial profit, to bring their fellow human beings under the cruel bondage of this degrading and destroying habit.

Almost exactly the same that has been said about tobacco smoking applies equally to excessive indulgence in alcohol.

Again, a majority of sincere Christians have through the years refrained from this kind of indulgence on the basis of the Bible's warnings against it.

It is a well-established fact that excessive indulgence in alcohol is a major contributing factor in many kinds of mental and physical disease and also in the modern toll of traffic accidents.

Here again, as in the case of smoking, millions of Christians have been preserved from harm and disaster by their practical application of the Bible's teaching.

A new, "modern" plague—AIDS—came upon the world in the 1980s. Christians who practice monogamy and refrain from immorality protect themselves and their children from the devastation of that disease. On the other hand, homosexuality, so often touted as an "alternative lifestyle," has proved to be an alternative death-style. Christians who have been protected from these evils can surely echo, with deep thankfulness, the words of David.

Concerning the works of men,
By the word of Your lips,
I have kept myself from the paths of the destroyer.

—PSALM 17:4

Victory Over Satan

Not merely does God's Word, applied in this way, give victory over sin. It is also the divinely appointed weapon that gives victory over Satan himself. The apostle Paul commands:

And take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

—EPHESIANS 6:17

Thus, God's Word is an indispensable weapon in the Christian warfare. All the other items of the Christian armor listed in Ephesians 6—the girdle, the breastplate, the shoes, the shield, and the helmet—are intended for defense. The only weapon of attack is the Spirit's sword, the Word of God.

Without a thorough knowledge of God's Word and how to apply it, a Christian has no weapon of attack, no weapon with which he can assault Satan and the powers of darkness and put them to flight. In view of this, it is not surprising that Satan has throughout the history of the Christian church used every means and device within his power to keep Christians ignorant of the true nature, authority, and power of God's Word.

In the use of God's Word as a weapon, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself is the Christian's supreme example. Satan brought three main temptations against Jesus, and Jesus met and defeated each temptation of Satan with the same weapon—the sword of God's written Word. (See Luke 4:1–13.) For in each

case Jesus began His answer with the phrase “It is written” and then quoted directly from the Scriptures.

There is significance in the two different phrases that Luke uses in this account of Satan’s temptation of Christ and its consequences. In Luke 4:1 he says:

Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit... was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.

But at the end of the temptations, in Luke 4:14, we read:

Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee.

Before His encounter with Satan, Jesus was already “filled with the Holy Spirit.” But it was only after Jesus had encountered and defeated Satan with the sword of God’s Word that He was able to commence His God-appointed ministry “in the power of the Spirit.” There is a distinction, therefore, between being filled with the Spirit and being able to minister in the power of the Spirit. Jesus only entered into the power of the Spirit after He had first used the sword of God’s Word to defeat Satan’s attempt to turn Him aside from the exercise of His Spirit-empowered ministry.

Without a thorough knowledge of God’s Word and how to apply it, a Christian has no weapon of attack, no weapon with which he can assault Satan and the powers of darkness and put them to flight.

This is a lesson that needs to be learned by Christians today. Many Christians who have experienced a perfectly scriptural infilling of the Holy Spirit never go on to serve God in the power of the Spirit. The reason is that they have failed to follow the example of Christ. They have never learned to wield the sword of God’s Word in such a way as to defeat Satan and repulse his opposition to the exercise of the ministry for which God actually filled them with the Holy Spirit.

It may safely be said that no person has a greater and more urgent need to study the Word of God than the Christian who has newly been filled with the Holy Spirit. Yet, sad to say, such Christians often seem to imagine that being filled with the Spirit is somehow a substitute for the diligent study and application of God’s Word. In reality, the very opposite is true.

No other item of a soldier’s armor is any substitute for his sword, and no matter how thoroughly he may be armed at all other points, a soldier

without his sword is in grave danger. So it is with the Christian. No other spiritual equipment or experience is any substitute for a thorough knowledge of God's Word, and no matter how thoroughly he may be equipped in all other respects, a Christian without the sword of God's Word is always in grave danger.

The early Christians of the apostolic age, though often simple and uneducated, certainly followed the example of their Lord in learning to know and use God's Word as a weapon of offense in the intense spiritual conflict brought upon them by their profession of faith in Christ. For example, the apostle John in his advanced years wrote to the young Christian men who had grown up under his instruction:

I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.

—1 JOHN 2:14

John makes three statements about these young men:

1. They are strong.
2. They have God's Word abiding in them.
3. They have overcome the wicked one (Satan).

The second of these three statements is related to the first and the third, as cause is related to effect. The reason why these young Christian men were strong and able to overcome Satan was that they had God's Word abiding in them. It was God's Word within them that gave them their spiritual strength.

The only source of such strength and victory is a thorough, abiding knowledge of God's Word.

We need to ask ourselves this question: how many of the young Christian people in our churches today are strong and have overcome the devil? If we do not see many young Christian people today who manifest this kind of spiritual strength and victory, the reason is not in doubt. It is simply this: the cause that produces these effects is not there.

The only source of such strength and victory is a thorough, abiding knowledge of God's Word. Christian young people who are not thoroughly instructed in God's Word can never be really strong and overcoming in their experience.

We are today in grave danger of underrating the spiritual capacity of

young people and treating them in a manner that is altogether too childish. There is even a tendency to create in young people today the impression that God has provided for them some special kind of Christianity with lesser demands and lower standards than those that God imposes upon adults. In this connection Solomon made a very relevant and penetrating remark.

For childhood and youth are vanity.

—ECCLESIASTES 11:10

In other words, childhood and youth are merely fleeting, external appearances that in no way alter the abiding spiritual realities that concern all souls alike.

William Booth's daughter, Catherine Booth-Clibborn, expressed a similar thought when she said, "There is no sex in soul." The deep, abiding spiritual realities upon which Christianity is based are in no way affected by differences of age or sex. Christianity is based upon such qualities as repentance, faith, obedience, self-sacrifice, devotion. These qualities are the same for men and women, boys and girls alike.

It is sometimes suggested that the way to meet this need of thorough scriptural teaching for Christian young people is to send them to Bible colleges. However, this proposed remedy can be accepted only with two qualifications. First, it must be stated that there is an increasing tendency at present, even among evangelical or full-gospel Bible colleges, to devote less and less time to the actual study of the Bible and more and more time to other secular studies. Paul warned the Colossians:

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men.

—COLOSSIANS 2:8

Paul also warned Timothy:

O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust [that is, the truth of God's Word], avoiding the profane and vain babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—by professing it, some have strayed concerning the faith.

—1 TIMOTHY 6:20–21

These warnings need to be repeated today. In many cases, it is possible for a young person to complete a course at a modern Bible college and come away with an inadequate knowledge of the Bible's teachings and how to apply them in a practical way.

The second qualification we must make is that no Bible college course, however sound and thorough it may be, can ever exonerate the pastors of local churches from their duty to provide all the members of their congregations with regular, systematic training in God's Word.

The local church is the central point in the whole New Testament plan for scriptural instruction, and no other institution can ever usurp the local church's function. The apostles and Christians of the New Testament had no other institution for giving scriptural instruction except the local church. Yet they were more successful in their task than we are today.

Other institutions, such as Bible colleges, may provide special instruction to supplement the teaching done in the local churches, but they can never take their place. The most desperate need of the great majority of local churches today is not more organization or better programs or more activities. It is simply this: thorough, practical, regular instruction in the basic truths of God's Word and how to apply them in every aspect of Christian life.

Only by this means can the church of Christ, as a whole, rise up in strength, administer in Christ's name the victory of Calvary, and accomplish the task committed to her by her Lord and Master.

This accords with the picture in Revelation of a victorious church at the close of this age.

And they [the Christians] overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.

—REVELATION 12:11

Here are revealed the three elements of victory: the blood, the Word, our testimony. The blood is the token and seal of Christ's finished work upon the cross and of all that this makes available to us of blessing and power and victory. Through the Word we come to know and understand all that Christ's blood has purchased for us. Finally, through testifying to that which the Word reveals concerning the blood, we make Christ's victory over Satan real and effectual in our personal experience.

As we study this divine program of victory over Satan, we see once again that the Word occupies a central position. Without proper knowledge of the Word, we cannot understand the true merits and power of Christ's blood, and thus our testimony as Christians lacks real conviction and authority. The whole of God's program for His people centers around the knowledge of His Word and the ability to apply it. Without this knowledge, the church finds herself today in the same condition as Israel in Hosea's day, concerning whom the Lord declared:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.
Because you have rejected knowledge,
I also will reject you.

—HOSEA 4:6

A church that rejects the knowledge of God's Word faces the certainty of rejection by God Himself and of destruction at the hands of her great adversary, the devil.

PURIFYING EFFECTS OF GOD'S WORD

Cleansing

The seventh great effect of God's Word is that of cleansing and sanctification. The key text for this is Ephesians 5:25–27.

Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.

There are a number of important points in this passage that deserve attention.

Notice, first, that the two processes of cleansing and sanctifying are closely joined together. However, although these two processes are closely related, they are not identical.

The distinction between them is this: that which is truly sanctified must of necessity be absolutely pure and clean, but that which is pure and clean need not necessarily be in the fullest sense sanctified. In other words, it is possible to have purity, or cleanness, without sanctification, but it is not possible to have sanctification without purity, or cleanness.

Thus cleansing is an essential part of sanctification but not the whole of it. Later in this study we shall examine more closely the exact meaning of the word *sanctification*.

Turning again to Ephesians 5 we notice, second, that one main, definite purpose for which Christ redeemed the church is “that He might sanctify and cleanse it” (v. 26).

Thus the purpose of Christ's atoning death for the church as a whole, and for each individual Christian in particular, is not fulfilled until those who are redeemed by His death have gone through a subsequent process of cleansing and sanctifying. Paul makes it plain that only those Christians who have gone through this process will be in the condition necessary for their final presentation to Christ as His bride—and the condition that he specifies is that of a glorious church, “not having spot or wrinkle or any

such thing . . . holy and without blemish” (v. 27).

The third point to notice in this passage is that the means that Christ uses to cleanse and sanctify the church is “the washing of water by the word” (v. 26). It is God’s Word that is the means of sanctifying and cleansing; in this respect the operation of God’s Word is compared to the washing of pure water.

The purpose of Christ’s atoning death for the church as a whole, and for each individual Christian in particular, is not fulfilled until those who are redeemed by His death have gone through a subsequent process of cleansing and sanctifying.

Even before Christ’s atoning death upon the cross had actually been consummated, He had already assured His disciples of the cleansing power of His Word that He had spoken to them.

You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

—JOHN 15:3

We see, therefore, that the Word of God is a divine agent of spiritual cleansing, compared in its operation to the washing of pure water.

Side by side with the Word, we must also set the other great agent of spiritual cleansing referred to by the apostle John.

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

—1 JOHN 1:7

Here John speaks of the cleansing power of Christ’s blood, shed upon the cross, to redeem us from sin.

God’s provision for spiritual cleansing always includes these two divine agents—the blood of Christ shed upon the cross and the washing with water by His Word. Neither is complete without the other. Christ redeemed us by His blood so that He might cleanse and sanctify us by His Word.

John places these two great operations of Christ in the closest possible connection with each other. Speaking of Christ, he says:

This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth.

—1 JOHN 5:6

John declares that Christ is not only the great Teacher who came to expound God's truth to men; He is also the great Savior who came to shed His blood to redeem men from their sin. In each case it is the Holy Spirit who bears testimony to Christ's work—to the truth and authority of His Word and to the merits and power of His blood.

John teaches us, therefore, that we must never separate these two aspects of Christ's work. We must never separate the Teacher from the Savior, nor the Savior from the Teacher.

It is not enough to accept Christ's teaching through the Word without also accepting and experiencing the power of His blood to redeem and cleanse us from sin. On the other hand, those who claim redemption through Christ's blood must thereafter submit themselves to the regular, inward washing of His Word.

There are various passages concerning the ordinances of the Old Testament sacrifices that set forth, in type, the close association between the cleansing by Christ's blood and the cleansing by His Word. For instance, in the ordinances of the tabernacle of Moses we read how God ordained that a laver of bronze containing clean water was to be placed close to the sacrificial altar of bronze and was to be used regularly in conjunction with it.

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base also of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. And you shall put water in it, for Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet in water from it. When they go into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn an offering made by fire to the LORD, they shall wash with water, lest they die. So they shall wash their hands and their feet, lest they die. And it shall be a statute forever to them—to him and his descendants throughout their generations."

—EXODUS 30:17–21

If we apply this picture to the New Testament, the sacrifice upon the bronze altar speaks of Christ's blood shed upon the cross for redemption from sin; the water in the laver speaks of the regular spiritual cleansing that we can receive only through God's Word. Each alike is essential to the eternal welfare of our souls. Like Aaron and his sons, we must regularly receive the benefits of both, "lest we die."

Sanctification

Having thus noted the process of cleansing through God's Word, let us now go on to consider the further process of sanctification.

First we must consider briefly the meaning of this word *sanctification*. The ending of the word—*ification*—occurs in many English words and always denotes an active process of doing or making something. For example, *clarification* means “making clear”; *rectification* means “making right or straight”; *purification* means “making pure,” and so on. The first part of the word *sanctification* is directly connected with the word *saint*—in fact, it is simply another way of writing the same word. *Saint* in turn is simply an alternative way of translating the word that is more normally translated “holy.”

Thus, the simple, literal meaning of sanctification is “making saintly,” or “making holy.”

The New Testament mentions five distinct agents in connection with sanctification:

1. The Spirit of God
2. The Word of God
3. The altar
4. The blood of Christ
5. Our faith

Following are the main passages that mention these various agents of sanctification:

God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

—2 THESSALONIANS 2:13

Peter tells Christians that they are...

...elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.

—1 PETER 1:2

Thus, both Paul and Peter mention “sanctification of [or by] the Holy Spirit” as an element of Christian experience.

Sanctification through the Word of God was referred to by Christ Himself when He prayed to the Father for His disciples.

Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

—JOHN 17:17

Here we see that sanctification comes through the truth of God's Word.

Sanctification through the altar is likewise referred to by Christ. He told the Pharisees:

Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift?

—MATTHEW 23:19

Here Christ endorses that which had already been taught in the Old Testament—that the gift that was offered in sacrifice to God was sanctified, made holy, set apart, by being placed upon God's altar. In the New Testament, as we shall see, the nature of the gift and of the altar is changed, but the principle still remains true that it is “the altar that sanctifies the gift.”

Sanctification through the blood of Christ is referred to in Hebrews 10:29. Here the author considers the case of the apostate—the person who has known all the blessings of salvation but has deliberately and openly rejected the Savior. Concerning such a person he asks:

Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

This passage shows that the true believer who continues in the faith is sanctified by the blood of the new covenant that he has accepted—that is, by Christ's own blood.

Sanctification through faith is referred to by Christ Himself, as quoted by Paul as he related the commission he received from Christ to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

To open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.

—ACTS 26:18

Here we see that sanctification is through faith in Christ. Summing up these passages, we arrive at this conclusion: Sanctification, according to the New Testament, is through five great means or agencies:

1. The Holy Spirit
2. The truth of God's Word
3. The altar of sacrifice

4. The blood of Christ

5. Faith in Christ

The process thus unfolded may be briefly outlined as follows: The Holy Spirit initiates the work of sanctification in the heart and mind of each one whom God has chosen in His eternal purposes. Through the truth of God's Word, as it is received in the heart and mind, the Holy Spirit speaks, reveals the altar of sacrifice, separates the believer from all that holds him back from God, and draws him to place himself in surrender and consecration upon that altar. There the believer is sanctified and set apart to God both by the contact with the altar and by the cleansing and purifying power of the blood that was shed upon the altar.

However, the exact extent to which each of these four sanctifying agents—the Spirit, the Word, the altar, and the blood—accomplish their sanctifying work in each believer is decided by the fifth factor in the process; that is, by the individual faith of each believer. In the work of sanctification, God does not violate the one great law that governs all His works of grace in each believer—the law of faith.

As you have believed, so let it be done for you.

—MATTHEW 8:13

Let us now examine a little more closely the part played by God's Word in this process of sanctification. First we must note that there are two aspects to sanctification—one negative and the other positive. The negative aspect consists in being separated from sin and the world and from all that is unclean and impure. The positive aspect consists in being made partaker of God's holy nature.

Through the truth of God's Word, as it is received in the heart and mind, the Holy Spirit speaks, reveals the altar of sacrifice, separates the believer from all that holds him back from God, and draws him to place himself in surrender and consecration upon that altar.

In much preaching, both on this and on other related subjects, there is a general tendency to overemphasize the negative at the expense of the positive. As Christians we tend to speak much more about the "do nots" in God's Word than about the "dos." For example, in Ephesians 5:18 we usually lay much more stress upon the negative "do not be drunk with wine" than we do upon the positive "be filled with the Spirit." However, this is an inaccurate and unsatisfactory way to present God's Word.

With regard to holiness, the Scriptures make it plain that this is something much more than a negative attitude of abstaining from sin and uncleanness. For example, in Hebrews 12:10 we are told that God, as a heavenly Father, chastens us, His children, for our profit that we may be partakers of His holiness. Again, in 1 Peter 1:15–16 we read:

But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.”

We see that holiness is a part of God’s eternal, unchanging nature. God was holy before sin ever entered into the universe, and God will still be holy when sin has once again been banished forever. We, as God’s people, are to be partakers of this part of His eternal nature. Separation from sin, just like cleansing from sin, is a stage in this process, but it is not the whole process. The final, positive result God desires in us goes beyond both cleansing and separation.

God’s Word plays its part both in the negative and in the positive aspects of sanctification. Paul describes the negative aspect in Romans 12:1–2.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

There are four successive stages in the process Paul describes here.

1. *Presenting our bodies as living sacrifices upon God’s altar.* We have already seen that the altar sanctifies that which is presented upon it.
2. *Not being conformed to the world*—that is, being separated from its vanity and sin.
3. *Being transformed by the renewing of our minds*—that is, learning to think in entirely new terms and values.
4. *Getting to know God’s will personally for our lives.* This revelation of God’s will is granted only to the renewed mind. The old, carnal, unrenewed mind can never know or understand God’s perfect will.

It is here, in the renewing of the mind, that the influence of God's Word is felt. As we read, study, and meditate in God's Word, it changes our whole way of thinking. It both cleanses us with its inward washing and separates us from all that is unclean and ungodly. We learn to think about things—to estimate them, to evaluate them—as God Himself thinks about things.

In learning to think differently, of necessity, we also act differently. Our outward lives are changed in harmony with our new inward processes of thought. We are no longer conformed to the world because we no longer think like the world. We are transformed by the renewing of our minds.

However, not to be conformed to the world is merely negative. It is not a positive end in itself. If we are not to be conformed to the world, to what then are we to be conformed? The answer is plainly stated by Paul.

For whom He [God] foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

—ROMANS 8:29

Here is the positive end of sanctification: to be conformed to the image of Christ. It is not enough that we are not conformed to the world—that we do not think and say and do the things that the world does. This is merely negative. Instead of all this, we must be conformed to Christ—we must think and say and do the things that Christ would do.

Paul dismisses the negative type of holiness as quite inadequate.

Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—"Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," which all concern things which perish with the using?

—COLOSSIANS 2:20-22

True sanctification goes far beyond this barren, legalistic, negative attitude. It is a positive conforming to the image of Christ Himself; a positive partaking of God's own holiness.

This positive aspect of sanctification, and the part played in it by God's Word, is beautifully summed up by Peter.

His [God's] divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

—2 PETER 1:3-4

There are three main points to notice here.

1. God's power has already provided us with all that we need for life and godliness. The provision is already made. We do not need to ask God to give us more than He has already given. We merely need to avail ourselves to the full of that which God has already provided.
2. This complete provision of God is given to us through the exceedingly great and precious promises of His own Word. The promises of God already contain within them all that we shall ever need for life and godliness. All that remains for us now to do is to appropriate and to apply these promises by active, personal faith.
3. The result of appropriating and applying God's promises is twofold, both negative and positive. Negatively, we escape the corruption that is in the world through lust; positively, we are made partakers of the divine nature. Here is the complete process of sanctification that we have described: both the negative escape from the world's corruption, and the positive partaking of God's own nature, of God's own holiness.

All this—both the negative and the positive—is made available to us through the promises of God's Word. It is in measure as we appropriate and apply the promises of God's Word that we experience true, scriptural sanctification.

Jacob once dreamed of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven. For the Christian, the counterpart to that ladder is found in God's Word. Its foot is set on earth, but its head reaches heaven—the plane of God's being. Each rung in that ladder is a promise. As we lay hold by the hands and feet of faith upon the promises of God's Word, we lift ourselves up by them out of the earthly realm and closer to the heavenly realm. Each promise of God's Word, as we claim it, lifts us higher above earth's corruption and imparts to us a further measure of God's nature.

Sanctification is by faith. But that faith is not merely negative or passive. The faith that truly sanctifies consists in a continual, active appropriating and applying of the promises of God's Word. It was for this reason that Jesus prayed to the Father:

Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

—JOHN 17:17

Chapter Eight

REVELATORY EFFECTS OF GOD'S WORD

IN THE LAST four chapters we have examined seven practical effects God's Word produces in us as, with faith and obedience, we receive and apply its teaching. These seven effects are:

1. Faith
2. The new birth
3. Complete spiritual nourishment
4. Healing and health for our physical bodies
5. Mental illumination and understanding
6. Victory over sin and Satan
7. Cleansing and sanctification

Now let us examine two further ways in which the Bible, as God's Word, works in the believer.

Our Mirror

The first of these is that the Bible provides us with a *mirror of spiritual revelation*. This operation of God's Word is described in James 1:23–25. In the two preceding verses James has already warned that for God's Word to produce its proper effects in us, there are two basic conditions:

1. We must “receive [it] with meekness” (v. 21)—that is, with the proper attitude of heart and mind
2. We must be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (v. 22)—that is, we must immediately apply it in a practical way in our daily lives.

If we fail to do this, James warns that we shall be deceiving ourselves; we may be calling ourselves Christians or disciples or Bible students, but we will not be experiencing any of the practical blessings and benefits of which the Bible speaks. We might sum this up by saying that the Bible works practically in those who apply it practically.

After this warning, James continues in the next three verses as follows.

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the word, this one will be blessed in what he does.

—JAMES 1:23–25

James likens God's Word to a mirror. The only difference is that a normal mirror shows us only what James calls our "natural face"—our external, physical features and appearance. The mirror of God's Word, as we look into it, reveals not our external, physical features, but our inward spiritual nature and condition. It reveals to us those things about ourselves that no material mirror and no work of human wisdom can reveal—things we can never come to know in any other way.

Someone has summed this up by saying: "Remember that while you are reading your Bible, your Bible is also reading you."

I can still recall, after the lapse of many years, how vividly I proved this in my own experience. I first began to study the Bible as a skeptic and an unbeliever—with the background of a student and teacher of philosophy. I approached it as being merely one among many systems of philosophy in the world. However, as I continued to study it, I became conscious, even against my own will, of certain strange and deep-seated changes taking place within me. My attitude of intellectual superiority, my sense of self-confidence and self-sufficiency began to crumble.

I had adopted the attitude of the ancient Greek philosopher who said, "Man is the measure of all things." I had assumed that by my own intellectual and critical faculties I was capable of measuring any book or system of wisdom that I cared to study. But now to my own surprise, as I studied the Bible, even though I could not fully understand it, I became conscious that I was being measured by some standard that was not my own nor that of any human being. Like Belshazzar in the hour of his feast, there seemed to open up before my unwilling eyes the words "You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting."

Without any special change of outward circumstance, I became inwardly restless and dissatisfied. Pleasures and activities that had previously attracted and occupied me lost their power to divert or to entertain. I became increasingly conscious of some deep need within my own being that I could neither define nor satisfy. I did not clearly understand it, but through the mirror of His Word, God was showing me the truth concern-

ing my own inner need and emptiness.

After several months this revelation of my need caused me, even in my spiritual ignorance and blindness, to seek God with humility and sincerity. Finding Him in this way, I discovered that He who had thus revealed my need through His written Word was able also to satisfy it completely through the Person of His living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yes, the Bible is a mirror of the soul. But in this, as in its other operations, the result it produces in us depends to a large extent upon our reaction to it.

In the natural order, when we look in a mirror, we normally do it with the intention of acting upon anything the mirror may reveal to us. If we see that our hair is untidy, we brush it; if we see that our face is dirty, we wash it; if our clothes are in disorder, we adjust them; if we see the evidence of some infection, we consult the doctor for suitable treatment.

To receive the benefits from the mirror of God's Word, we must act in a similar way. If the mirror reveals a condition of spiritual uncleanness, we must without delay seek the cleansing that comes to us through the blood of Christ. If the mirror reveals some spiritual infection, we must consult the Great Physician of our souls, the One "who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases" (Ps. 103:3).

Only by acting practically and without delay upon that which the mirror of God's Word reveals to us can we receive the forgiveness, cleansing, healing, and all the other blessings God has provided for us.

To receive the benefits from the mirror of God's Word . . . we must without delay seek the cleansing that comes to us through the blood of Christ.

It is just at this point that many people fail to make proper use of God's mirror, to their own spiritual and eternal loss. Through the hearing or the reading of God's Word and the moving of God's Spirit, they come under conviction concerning those things in their hearts and lives that are unclean, harmful, and displeasing to God. Looking thus into the mirror of God's Word, they see their own spiritual condition just as God sees it.

Their immediate reaction is one of sorrow and remorse. They realize their need and their danger. They may even go forward to the altar at some church, pray, and shed tears. But their reaction goes no further than this. There is no real effectual change in the way they live. By the next day the impression has begun to wear off. They start to settle down into their old ways.

Very soon such a person forgets *what kind of man he was*. He no longer recalls the unpleasant truths God's mirror so clearly and faithfully revealed

to him. Unmoved and complacent, he continues on a course that takes him further and further from God.

However, the mirror of God's Word can reveal not only the unpleasant but also the pleasant. It can reveal not only what we are in our own fallen condition without Christ, but also what we can become through faith in Christ. It can reveal not only the filthy rags of our own righteousness, but also the spotless garment of salvation and the shining robe of righteousness that we can receive through faith in Christ. It can reveal not only the corruption and the imperfections of "the old man" without Christ, but also the holiness and the perfections of "the new man" in Christ.

If, when God's mirror first reveals to us the truth of our own sin and uncleanness, we immediately act upon this revelation—if we repent, if we believe and obey the gospel—then the next time we look into the mirror we no longer see our old sinful nature. Instead we see ourselves as God now sees us in Christ: forgiven, cleansed, justified, a new creation. We are made to understand that a miracle has taken place.

The faithful mirror no longer reveals our sins or our failures. Rather it reveals to us:

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ.

—2 CORINTHIANS 5:17–18

Not only have the old things passed away and all things become new, but *all things are of God*. In other words, God Himself accepts responsibility for every feature and aspect of the new creation in Christ, as it is here revealed in His own mirror. There is nothing at all in it of man's ways or doings. The whole thing is of God Himself.

A little further on in the same chapter, Paul says again:

For He made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

—2 CORINTHIANS 5:21

Note the completeness of the exchange: Christ was made sin with our sinfulness that we in turn might be made righteous with God's righteousness. What is God's righteousness? It is a righteousness without blemish and without spot, a righteousness that has never known sin. This is the righteousness that is imputed to us in Christ. We need to gaze long and earnestly at this in God's mirror until we see ourselves there as God sees us.

We find the same revelation also in the Old Testament, in the Song of

Solomon, where Christ (the Bridegroom) speaks to the church (His bride) and says:

You are all fair, my love,
And there is no spot in you.

—SONG OF SOLOMON 4:7

Here the flawless mirror reveals a flawless righteousness, which is ours in Christ.

Paul emphasizes the need for Christians to look continually in the mirror of God's Word.

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

—2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

Paul, like James, is referring to the mirror of God's Word. He tells us that this mirror reveals to us who believe, not our sins, which have been done away with in Christ never to be remembered anymore, but in their place it reveals the glories of the Lord, which He is waiting to impart to us by faith. Paul emphasizes that it is while we are thus looking into the mirror and beholding there the glories of the Lord that the Spirit of God is able to work upon us and to transform us into the very image of those glories we behold.

In this, as in so many other examples of Scripture, we see that the Spirit and the Word of God are always ordained to work together in harmony. It is while we look into the mirror of the Word of God that the Spirit works upon us and changes us into the likeness of what the mirror reveals. If we cease to look into the mirror of the Word, then the Spirit is no longer able to work in this way.

In 2 Corinthians Paul returns to the same theme.

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

—2 CORINTHIANS 4:17-18

Here Paul teaches that the faithful, victorious enduring of temporal afflictions can produce in us, as believers, results of great and eternal glory; but he

adds the same qualification as in the previous chapter. This working out of spiritual glory within us is only effective...

...while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.

—2 CORINTHIANS 4:18

If we once take our eyes off the eternal things, our afflictions no longer produce the same beneficial effects within us. It is in the mirror of God's Word that we behold these eternal things. Therefore, it is in this mirror that we must continue steadfastly to look.

For example, notice how Moses endured forty years of exile in the wilderness after he fled from Egypt.

By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.

—HEBREWS 11:27

It is in the mirror of God's Word that we behold eternal things.

Note the source of Moses' power to endure affliction: "he endured as seeing Him who is invisible." It was Moses' vision of the eternal, invisible God and Savior of his people that gave him faith and courage to endure and to triumph over all his afflictions. The same vision can give the same faith and courage to us today. Where shall we find this continuing vision of God in our daily needs and testings? In the wonderful spiritual mirror that He has given us for this very purpose—that is, the mirror of His own Word. The secret both of transforming grace and of victorious living lies here—in the use that we make of God's mirror. While we use the mirror aright, God's Spirit works out these effects in our lives.

Our Judge

Finally, God's Word is also our judge. Throughout the entire Bible it is emphasized that by sovereign eternal right, the office of judge belongs to God alone. This theme runs through the entire Old Testament. For instance, Abraham says to the Lord, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). Jephthah said, "May the LORD, the Judge, render judgment this day" (Judg. 11:27). The psalmist wrote, "Surely He is God who judges in the earth" (Ps. 58:11). And Isaiah said, "For the LORD is our Judge" (Isa. 33:22).

As we move on into the New Testament, we enter into a fuller revelation of the motives and methods of God's judgment. Christ says:

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

—JOHN 3:17

Again we read in 2 Peter 3:9:

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

These verses—and many others like them—reveal that God delights to administer mercy and salvation, but He is reluctant to administer wrath and judgment.

This reluctance of God to administer judgment finds expression in the way in which, as the New Testament reveals, God's judgment will ultimately be carried out. In the first instance, by sovereign eternal right, judgment belongs to God the Father. Peter speaks of "the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work" (1 Pet. 1:17).

Here judgment of all men is plainly stated to be the office of God the Father. However, Christ reveals that the Father has chosen in His sovereign wisdom to commit all judgment to the Son.

For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father.

—JOHN 5:22–23

Again, Christ says:

For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.

—JOHN 5:26–27

Here we see that the office of judgment has been transferred from the Father to the Son.

Two reasons are given for this. First, because with the office of judge goes also the honor due to the judge, and in this way all men will be obliged to show the same honor toward God the Son as they would toward God the Father. Second, because Christ is also the Son of Man, as well as the Son of God—that is, He partakes of the human as well as of the divine nature, and

thus in His judgment He is able to make allowance, from His own experience, for all the infirmities and temptations of human flesh.

However, such is the grace and the mercy of the divine nature in the Son, as in the Father, that Christ, too, is unwilling to administer judgment. For this reason He, in turn, has transferred the final authority of judgment from His own Person to the Word of God.

And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.

—JOHN 12:47–48

This reveals that the final authority of all judgment is vested in the Word of God. This is the impartial, unchanging standard of judgment to which all men must one day answer.

In Isaiah 66:2 the Lord says:

But on this one will I look:
On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit
And who trembles at My word.

In the light of the New Testament revelation, we can well understand why a man should tremble at God's Word. For as we read its pages and hear its teaching, we find ourselves, by anticipation, standing before the judgment bar of Almighty God. Here, already revealed to those who will receive them, are unfolded the principles and standards of divine judgment for the whole human race. Christ described God's judgment this way:

Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

—MATTHEW 5:18

Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

—MATTHEW 24:35

In the closing chapters of the Bible, the veil of the future is drawn aside to reveal what will transpire when, in fulfillment of Christ's words, heaven and earth pass away, and God's throne is set for the last great judgment.

Then I saw a great white throne and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for

them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God...and the dead were judged...each one according to his works.

—REVELATION 20:11–13

At this last great scene Christ has assured us there will be one, and only one, standard of judgment: the eternal, unchanging Word of God. This will be the fulfillment of Psalm 119:160:

The entirety of Your word is truth,
And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever.

Here will be unfolded, in their absolute completeness, every one of the righteous judgments of God's unchanging Word.

If we can but see it, this revelation that all judgment will be according to God's Word is a provision of God's grace and mercy, since it enables us here, in this present life, to anticipate God's judgment upon ourselves and thus to escape from it. For this reason Paul says:

For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

—1 CORINTHIANS 11:31

How may we judge ourselves? By applying to every aspect and detail of our lives the judgments of God's Word. If we do this, and then by repentance and faith accept God's provision of forgiveness and mercy, God Himself will never bring judgment upon us. Christ assures us of this.

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

—JOHN 5:24

This assurance is repeated in Romans 8:1.

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

What must we do to escape God's condemnation? We must hear His Word. In humility and repentance we must accept every one of its righteous judgments as applied to our lives. In faith we must accept its record that Christ took our condemnation and suffered our punishment. Accepting these truths of God's Word, we are acquitted, we are justified, and we pass out from under condemnation and death into pardon and everlasting life.

All this is through God's Word. Refused and rejected, it will be our judge at the last day. Accepted and obeyed, it assures us already of perfect pardon and full salvation through a righteousness that is not ours, but the righteousness of God Himself.

PART II

REPENT AND BELIEVE



Repent, and believe in the gospel.

—MARK 1:15—

Introduction to Part II

THE BASIC DOCTRINES

WHEN WE SET out to study the Bible in detail, is there some easy way to identify the basic and most important doctrines that should be studied first?

This is a reasonable question, and, like all such questions related to the study of the Bible, an answer to it may be found within the pages of the Bible itself. The Bible does clearly state that certain of its doctrines are more important than the rest and should therefore be studied first. In fact, the Bible gives a list of six such basic, or foundational, doctrines.

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

—HEBREWS 6:1–2

In the margin of the 1611 edition of the King James Version, the alternative reading suggested for “the elementary principles of Christ” is “the word of the beginning of Christ.” This brings out the point that we are here dealing with the doctrines that should constitute the beginning—the starting-off point—in our study of Christ and His teaching as a whole.

This point is further emphasized by the use, in the same verse, of the phrase “the foundation.” The writer of Hebrews is setting two thoughts side by side: (1) the laying of the right doctrinal foundation; (2) going on after this to perfection—that is, to a completed edifice of Christian doctrine and conduct. The purpose of his exhortation is that we should go on to perfection, to the completed edifice. But he makes it plain that we cannot hope to do this unless we have first laid a complete and stable foundation of the basic doctrines.

In speaking of this foundation, the writer lists in order the following six successive doctrines:

1. Repentance from dead works
2. Faith toward God

3. The doctrine of baptisms
4. Laying on of hands
5. Resurrection of the dead
6. Eternal judgment

We need to note one particularly important feature of this inspired outline of basic doctrines. If we follow it through in the order given, it spans the entire gamut of Christian experience. It starts—in time—from the sinner's initial response: repentance. It takes us on, by a logical succession, to the climax—in eternity—of all Christian experience: resurrection and final judgment.

While it is important to study carefully each of these individual doctrines, we must never lose the vision of the single divine and perfect plan that runs through them all. In particular, we must never become so occupied with the things of time that we lose the vision of eternity. Otherwise, we may suffer the tragedy described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:19.

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

The studies that follow in this section focus on the first two of these doctrines: repentance and faith.

Explained From Greek and Hebrew

First of all, we need a clear understanding of the meaning of the word *repentance* as used in the Scripture.

In the New Testament the English verb “to repent” is normally used to translate the Greek verb *metanoein*. This Greek verb *metanoein* has one definite meaning throughout the history of the Greek language, right through classical Greek down into New Testament Greek. Its basic meaning is always the same: “to change one’s mind.” Thus, “repentance” in the New Testament is not an emotion but a decision.

Knowing this fact serves to dispel many false impressions and ideas connected with repentance. Many people associate repentance with emotion—with the shedding of tears and so on. It is possible, however, for a person to feel great emotion and to shed many tears and yet never repent in the scriptural sense. Other people associate repentance with the carrying out of special religious rites or ordinances—with what is called “doing penance.” But here, too, the same applies: it is possible to go through many religious rites and ordinances and yet never repent in the scriptural sense.

True repentance is a firm, inward decision; a change of mind.

Repentance is an inner change of mind resulting in an outward turning back, or turning around; to face and to move in a completely new direction.

If we turn back to the Old Testament, we find that the word most commonly translated “to repent” means literally “to turn,” “to return,” “to turn back.” This harmonizes perfectly with the meaning of repentance in the New Testament. The New Testament word denotes the inner decision, the inner change of mind; the Old Testament word denotes the outward action that is the expression of the inward change of mind—the act of turning back, of turning around.

Thus, the New Testament emphasizes the inward nature of true repentance;

the Old Testament emphasizes the outward expression in action of the inner change. Putting the two together, we form this complete definition of repentance: repentance is an inner change of mind resulting in an outward turning back, or turning around; to face and to move in a completely new direction.

The Sinner's First Response to God

The perfect example of true repentance, defined in this way, is found in the parable of the prodigal son. (See Luke 15:11–32.) Here we read how the prodigal turned his back on father and home and went off into a distant land, there to waste all that he had in sin and dissipation. Eventually he came to himself, hungry, lonely, and in rags, sitting among the swine, longing for something to fill his stomach. At this point he made a decision. He said, “I will arise and go to my father” (v. 18).

He immediately carried out his decision: “And he arose and came to his father” (v. 20). This is true repentance: first, the inward decision; then the outward act of that decision—the act of turning back to father and home.

In his own unregenerate, sinful condition, every man that was ever born has turned his back on God, his Father, and on heaven, his home. Each step he takes is a step away from God and from heaven. As he walks this way, the light is behind him, and the shadows are before him. The farther he goes, the longer and darker the shadows become. Each step he takes is one step nearer the end—one step nearer the grave, nearer hell, nearer the endless darkness of a lost eternity.

For every man who takes this course, there is one essential act he must make. He must stop, change his mind, change his direction, face the opposite way, turn his back to the shadows, and face toward the light.

This first, essential act is called repentance in the Scriptures. It is the first move any sinner must make who desires to be reconciled with God.

Distinguished From Remorse

Of course, there are some passages in some translations where the verb infinitive “to repent” is used in a different sense, but when we examine these passages carefully, we find that the English phrase “to repent” is used to translate some other word in the original language. For example, in the 1611 King James Version we read in Matthew 27:3–4 that when Judas Iscariot saw that Christ had been condemned to death, afterward he “repented” of betraying Christ for money.

Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to

the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that.

Here we read that Judas “repented himself.” But the Greek word used in the original is not the word *metanoein* defined earlier. The Greek word used of Judas, *metamelein*, denotes that which people often wrongly interpret as repentance: remorse, anguish. There is no doubt that at this moment Judas experienced intense anguish and remorse. Nevertheless, he did not experience true, scriptural repentance; he did not change his mind, his course, his direction.

On the contrary, the very next verse says he went and hanged himself; in Acts 1:25 this is expressed by the words:

Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.

Certainly Judas experienced emotion—strong emotion, bitter anguish, and remorse. But he did not experience true repentance; he did not change his mind or his course. The truth is that he could not change his course; he had already gone too far. In spite of the Savior’s warning, he had deliberately committed himself to a course from which there could be no return. He had passed “the place of repentance.”

What a terrible and solemn lesson this is! It is possible for a man, by stubborn and willful continuance in his own way, to come to a place of no turning back—a place where the door of repentance has, by his own willfulness, been forever slammed shut behind him.

Another man who made this same tragic error was Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.

For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

—HEBREWS 12:17

In a foolish, careless moment Esau sold his birthright to his brother Jacob in exchange for a bowl of soup. Genesis records: “Thus Esau despised his birthright” (Gen. 25:34). We must remember that in despising his birthright, he despised all the blessings and the promises of God that were associated with the birthright. Later, Esau regretted what he had done. He sought to regain the birthright and the blessing, but he was rejected. Why? Because he found no place of repentance. (In the margin of the 1611 King James Version the alternative translation is: “He found no way to change his mind” [Heb. 12:17]).

Here is further evidence that strong emotion is not necessarily proof of

repentance. Esau cried aloud and shed bitter tears. But in spite of all this, he found no place of repentance. By a trivial, impetuous act he had decided the whole course of his life and his destiny both for time and for eternity. He had committed himself to a course from which he could find no way of return.

How many men today do just the same as Esau! For a few moments of sensual pleasure or carnal indulgence, they despise all the blessings and promises of Almighty God. Later, when they feel their mistake, when they cry out for those spiritual and eternal blessings that they had despised, to their dismay they find themselves rejected. Why? Because they find no place of repentance, no way to change their minds.

The Only Way to True Faith

The New Testament is unanimous on this one point: true repentance must always go before true faith. Without true repentance there can never be true faith.

The call to repentance begins at the very introduction to the New Testament with the ministry of John the Baptist.

The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the LORD,
Make His paths straight.”

John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

—MARK 1:3-4

John the Baptist’s call to repentance was a necessary preparation for the revelation of the Messiah to Israel. Until Israel had been called back to God in repentance, their long-awaited Messiah could not be revealed among them.

A little further on we read the first message that Christ Himself preached after John had prepared the way before Him.

Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel... and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

—MARK 1:14-15

The first commandment that ever fell from the lips of Christ was not to believe but to repent. First repent, then believe.

After His death and resurrection, when Christ commissioned His apostles to go out to all nations with the gospel, once again the first word in His message was “repentance.”

Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

—LUKE 24:46–47

Here again it is repentance first, and after that, remission of sins.

Shortly after the resurrection, the apostles, through their spokesman Peter, began to fulfill this commission of Christ. After the Holy Spirit's coming on the Day of Pentecost, the convicted (but still unconverted) multitude asked: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). To this inquiry there came an immediate and definite answer.

Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

—ACTS 2:38

Here again it is repentance first; after that, baptism and remission of sins.

When Paul spoke to the elders of the church at Ephesus, he outlined the gospel message that he had preached to them.

I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

—ACTS 20:20–21

The order of Paul's message is the same: first repentance, then faith.

Finally, as we have already seen in Hebrews 6:1–2, the order of the basic foundation doctrines of the Christian faith is first repentance from dead works, then faith, baptisms, and so on.

Without exception, throughout the entire New Testament, repentance is the first response to the gospel that God demands. Nothing else can come before it, and nothing else can take its place.

True repentance must always precede true faith. Without such repentance, faith alone is an empty profession. This is one reason why the experience of so many Christians today is so unstable and insecure. They are seeking to build without the first of the great foundation doctrines. They are professing faith, but they have never practiced true repentance. As a result, the faith that they profess procures for them neither the favor of God nor the respect of the world.

In many places today the simplification of the gospel message has been taken one step too far. The message often preached today is “Only believe.” But that is not the message of Christ. Christ and His apostles preached “Repent and believe.” Any preacher who leaves out the call to repentance is misleading sinners and misrepresenting God. For Paul tells us that it is God Himself who “commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). That is the general edict of God to the entire human race: “All men everywhere must repent.”

**True repentance must always precede true faith.
Without such repentance, faith alone is
an empty profession.**

In Hebrews 6:1 repentance is defined as “repentance from dead works”; in Acts 20:21 it is defined as “repentance toward God.” This means that, in the act of repentance, we turn away from our dead works and face toward God, ready to hear and obey His next command.

The phrase “dead works” includes all acts and activities that are not based upon repentance and faith. It includes even the acts and activities of religion—even of professing Christianity—if they are not built on this basis. It is in this sense that Isaiah cries out:

And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.

—ISAIAH 64:6

There is no reference here to acts of open sin and wickedness. Even those acts that are done in the name of religion and morality, if they are not based on repentance and faith, are not acceptable to God. Charity, prayers, church attendance, every kind of religious rite and ordinance—if they are not based on repentance and faith—are merely “dead works” and “filthy rags”!

There is one other fact about scriptural repentance that must be emphasized. True repentance begins with God and not with man. It originates not in the will of man but in the free and sovereign grace of God. Apart from the working of God’s grace and the moving of God’s Spirit, man left to himself is incapable of repentance. For this reason the psalmist cries out for restoration.

Restore us, O God...
And we shall be saved!

—PSALM 80:3

The word translated “restore us” means literally “cause us to turn back.” Jeremiah uses the same word in Lamentations 5:21.

Turn us back to You, O LORD, and we will be restored.

Unless God first moves man toward Himself, man cannot of his own unaided will turn to God and be saved. The first move is always made by God.

In the New Testament Christ expressed the same truth.

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.

—JOHN 6:44

The supreme crisis of every human life comes at the moment of the Spirit’s drawing to repentance. Accepted, this drawing leads us to saving faith and eternal life; rejected, it leaves the sinner to continue on his way to the grave and the unending darkness of an eternity apart from God. The Scripture makes it plain that even in this life it is possible for a man to pass “the place of repentance”—to come to a point where the Spirit of God will never again draw him to repentance, and where all hope is lost even before he enters the portals of eternity.

It is fitting to close this study with the words of Christ in Luke 13:3 (which are also repeated in verse 5).

Unless you repent you will all likewise perish.

Christ was speaking of men who died in the very act of performing a religious rite; that is, a company of Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their own sacrifices. While carrying out their sacrifices in the temple, these men had been executed by order of the Roman governor, and their blood had been mingled on the temple floor with that of their sacrifices.

Yet Christ tells us that these men perished; they went to a lost eternity. Even their religious act of sacrifice in the temple could not save their souls, because it was not based on true repentance.

The same is true of the religious ceremonies of many professing Christians today. None of these religious activities is any substitute for true repentance. Without such repentance, Christ Himself said, “...you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3).

THE NATURE OF FAITH

OUTSIDE THE SCRIPTURES the word *faith* has many different meanings, but in our present study we do not need to concern ourselves with these. Within the Scriptures there are two definite, distinguishing features of faith. First, faith always originates directly in God's Word; second, it is always directly related to God's Word.

Faith is one of comparatively few words actually defined in the Bible. This definition is found in Hebrews 11:1.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

This verse might also be translated: "Now faith is the ground, or confidence, of things hoped for, a sure persuasion, or conviction, concerning things not seen."

Distinguished From Hope

This important verse brings out various facts about faith. First of all, it indicates a distinction between faith and hope. There are two main ways in which faith differs from hope. The first is that hope is directed toward the future, but faith is established in the present. Hope is an attitude of expectancy concerning things that are yet to be, but faith is a substance—a confidence, something real and definite within us—that we possess here and now.

The second main difference between faith and hope is that hope is anchored in the realm of the mind; faith is anchored in the realm of the heart. This is very strikingly brought out in Paul's description of scriptural armor required by the Christian soldier.

But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.

—1 THESSALONIANS 5:8

Notice that faith—together with love—is found in the region of the breast, that is, the region of the heart. But hope is pictured as a helmet, in the region

of the head, or mind. Thus, hope is a mental attitude of expectancy concerning the future; faith is a condition of the heart, producing within us here and now something so real that it can be described by the word *substance*.

**Hope is an attitude of expectancy concerning things
that are yet to be, but faith is a substance—
a confidence, something real and definite within us—
that we possess here and now.**

In Romans Paul again directly associates the heart with the exercise of faith, or believing.

With the heart one believes unto [literally, *into*]* righteousness.

—ROMANS 10:10

Many people make a profession of faith in Christ and the Bible, but their faith is only in the realm of the mind. It is an intellectual acceptance of certain facts and doctrines. This is not true, scriptural faith, and it does not produce any vital change in the lives of those who profess it.

On the other hand, heart faith always produces a definite change in those who profess it. When associated with the heart, the verb “to believe” becomes a verb of motion. Hence Paul says, “With the heart one believes [into] righteousness”—not merely “unto righteousness,” but “into righteousness.” It is one thing to believe with the mind “unto righteousness,” merely as an abstract theory or ideal. It is quite another thing to believe with the heart “into righteousness,” that is, to believe in a way that produces a transformation of habits, character, and life.

In the words of Christ, the verb phrase “to believe” is regularly followed by the preposition *into*, to express change or motion. For instance, He says:

You believe in [literally, *into*] God, believe also in [literally, *into*] Me.

—JOHN 14:1

This brings out the fact that the verb phrase “to believe” is associated with a process of change or motion. It is not enough to believe “in” Christ with mere mental acceptance of the facts of His life or the truths of His teaching. We must believe “into” Christ—we must be moved by heartfelt faith out of ourselves and into Christ, out of our sin and into His righteousness, out of our weakness and into His power, out of our failure and into His victory, out

* The Greek preposition used here is *eis*, which is regularly translated “into.”

of our limitations and into His omnipotence. This scriptural faith of the heart always produces change. It is always believing *into* Christ and *into* righteousness, and the result is always something definite, experienced here and now, not something merely hoped for in the future.

For this reason, in John 6:47 Christ uses the present and not the future tense. He says, “He who believes...has everlasting life”—not *shall have*, but already *has*, everlasting life. Scriptural faith into Christ produces everlasting life here and now within the believer. It is not something that we hope to have in the next world after death. It is something that we already possess, something that we already enjoy, a reality, a substance within us.

So many people have a religion that they hope will somehow do them good when they reach the threshold of eternity. But true Bible faith gives the believer a here-and-now experience and an assurance of everlasting life already within him. His faith is a real substance within him. Because of this present faith he also has a serene hope, a sure confidence concerning the future. A hope that is based on this kind of faith will stand the test of death and eternity, but a hope that lacks this present substance of faith is mere wishful thinking, doomed to final, bitter disillusionment.

Based Solely on God’s Word

Let us turn back now to the definition of faith given in Hebrews 11:1 and note one other important fact about faith.

Faith is “the evidence of things not seen,” or a sure conviction concerning things not seen. This shows that faith deals with *things not seen*.

Faith is not based on the evidence of our physical senses but on the eternal, invisible truths and realities revealed by God’s Word. Paul brings out this contrast between the objects of faith and the objects of sense perception when he says, “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7).

Faith is here contrasted with sight. Sight, along with the other physical senses, is related to the objects of the physical world. Faith is related to the truths revealed in God’s Word. Our senses deal with things that are material, temporary, and changeable. Faith deals with the revealed truths of God, which are invisible, eternal, and unchanging.

If we are carnally minded, we can accept only that which our senses reveal to us. But if we are spiritually minded, our faith makes the truths of God’s Word more real than anything that our senses may reveal to us. We do not base our faith on that which we see or experience; we base our faith on God’s Word. Thereafter, that which we see or experience is the outcome of that which we have already believed. In spiritual experience sight comes after faith, not before it.

David says:

I would have lost heart, unless I had believed
That I would see the goodness of the LORD
In the land of the living.

—PSALM 27:13

David did not see first and then believe. He believed first, and then he saw. Notice also that the experience that faith produced for him was not merely something after death, in the next world, but here and now, in the land of the living.

This same lesson is brought out in the conversation between Jesus and Martha outside the tomb of Lazarus.

Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"

—JOHN 11:39-40

Here Jesus makes it plain that faith consists in believing first, and then seeing—not the other way around. Most carnally minded people reverse this order. They say, "I only believe in what I can see." But this is incorrect. When we actually see a thing, we do not need to exercise faith for it. It is when we cannot see that we need to exercise faith. As Paul says, faith and sight are opposite in their nature.

Quite often in our experience we find an apparent conflict between the evidence of our senses and the revelation of God's Word. For instance, we may see and feel within our bodies all the evidence of physical sickness. Yet the Bible reveals that Jesus "Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses" (Matt. 8:17) and "by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24).

**We must recognize that mere mental acceptance
of the Bible's statements concerning healing and
health lacks the power to make them real in our
physical experience.**

Here is an apparent conflict. Our senses tell us we are sick. The Bible tells us we are healed. This conflict between the testimony of our senses and the testimony of God's Word confronts us, as believers, with the possibility of two alternative reactions.

On the one hand, we may accept the testimony of our senses and thus accept our physical sickness. In this way we become the slaves of our carnal mind. On the other hand, we may hold firmly to the testimony of God's Word that we are healed.

If we do this with genuine, active faith, the testimony of our senses will in due course be brought into line with the testimony of God's Word, and we shall then be able to say we are healed, not merely on the basis of faith in God's Word, but also on the basis of actual physical experience and the testimony of our senses.

At this point, however, it is necessary to reemphasize that the kind of faith that produces these results is faith in the heart, not in the mind. We must recognize that mere mental acceptance of the Bible's statements concerning healing and health lacks the power to make them real in our physical experience. The words of Paul in Ephesians 2:8 concerning faith for salvation apply equally to faith for healing. Thus we may say:

For by grace you have been saved [healed] through faith, and that [faith] not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

The faith that brings healing is a gift of God's sovereign grace. It cannot be produced by any kind of mental gymnastics or psychological techniques. This kind of faith can be apprehended only by the spiritual mind. To the carnal mind it appears foolish. The carnal mind accepts the testimony of the senses in all circumstances and is thus ruled by the senses. The spiritual mind accepts the testimony of God's Word as invariably and unchangeably true and then accepts the testimony of the senses only insofar as it agrees with the testimony of God's Word. Thus, the attitude of the spiritual mind toward the testimony of God's Word is summed up by David.

I cling to Your testimonies;
O LORD, do not put me to shame!

—PSALM 119:31

Concerning Your testimonies,
I have known of old that You have founded them forever.

—PSALM 119:152

The scriptural pattern of this kind of faith is found in the experience of Abraham. (See Romans 4:17–21.) Paul tells us that Abraham's faith was directed toward God...

... who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.

—ROMANS 4:17

This statement that God “calls those things which do not exist as though they did” means that as soon as God has declared a thing to be true, faith immediately reckons that thing to be true, even though no evidence of its truth may be manifested to the senses.

Thus, God called Abraham “a father of many nations,” and from that moment forward Abraham reckoned himself as being what God had called him, “a father of many nations,” even though at that time he had not even one son born to Sarah and himself.

Abraham did not wait until he saw evidence being worked out in his physical experience before he would accept God’s statement as true. On the contrary, he accepted God’s statement as true first, and later his physical experience was brought into line with what God had declared.

In the next verse Paul tells us that Abraham, “contrary to hope, in hope believed” (Rom. 4:18).

This phrase “in hope believed” tells us that at this time Abraham had both faith and hope—hope concerning the future and faith in the present—and that his hope concerning the future was the outcome of his faith in the present.

[Abraham] did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb.

—ROMANS 4:19

Abraham refused to accept the testimony of his senses. The testimony of his senses undoubtedly told him that it was no longer possible for him and Sarah to have a child. But Abraham did not accept this testimony because it did not agree with what God had said. Abraham turned a deaf ear to the testimony of his senses; he refused to consider it.

He [Abraham] did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief...being fully convinced that what He [God] had promised He was also able to perform.

—ROMANS 4:20–21

This shows clearly the object upon which Abraham’s faith was focused: God’s promise. Thus, faith is based on the promises and statements of God’s Word and accepts the testimony of the senses only insofar as they agree with the statements of God’s Word.

A little earlier in Romans 4 Paul calls Abraham “the father of all those who believe” (v. 11), and in the next verse he speaks of those “who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had” (v. 12).

This shows that scriptural faith consists in acting like Abraham and in following the steps of his faith. In analyzing the nature of Abraham’s faith, we have seen that there were three successive steps or stages.

1. Abraham accepted God’s promise as being true from the moment it was uttered.
2. Abraham refused to accept the testimony of his senses as long as it did not agree with the statement of God.
3. Because Abraham held fast to what God had promised, his physical experience and the testimony of his senses were brought into line with the statement of God.

Thus, the thing that he had first accepted in naked faith, contrary to the testimony of his senses, became reality in his own physical experience, confirmed by the testimony of his senses.

By many, this attitude of accepting God’s Word as true in defiance of the testimony of our senses would be dismissed as mere foolishness or fanaticism. Yet the remarkable thing is that philosophers and psychologists of many different ages and backgrounds have agreed in declaring that the testimony of our physical senses is variable, subjective, and unreliable.

If, then, the testimony of our senses cannot be accepted by itself as true and reliable, where can we find the correct standard of truth and reality by which the testimony of the senses must be judged? To this question neither philosophy nor psychology has ever been able to offer any satisfactory answer.

The ultimate, unchanging standard of all truth and reality is found in God’s Word.

Indeed, all through the centuries, philosophers and psychologists have echoed the question asked by Pilate as he sat in his judgment hall: “What is truth?” (John 18:38). For the Christian believer, however, the answer is found in the words of Christ to His Father: “Your Word is truth” (John 17:17).

The ultimate, unchanging standard of all truth and reality is found in God’s Word. Faith consists in hearing, believing, and acting upon this truth.

In considering the relationship between faith and our physical senses, it is necessary to make a clear distinction between true, scriptural faith on the one

hand and such teachings as mind over matter or Christian Science (falsely so-called) on the other hand.

The two main points of difference are as follows: First, teachings such as mind over matter or Christian Science tend to magnify and exalt the purely human element—such things as man’s mind, or reason, or willpower. Thus, these teachings are essentially man-centered. On the other hand, true, scriptural faith is essentially God-centered. It abases all that is human and magnifies only God and God’s truth and power.

Second, teachings such as mind over matter or Christian Science are not based directly, or even mainly, upon the Word of God. Many of the things they assert and seek to make real by the exercise of the human will are not in accordance with the teaching of God’s Word. In fact, in certain respects, they are contrary to God’s Word. On the other hand, scriptural faith, by its very nature and definition, is confined within the limits of God’s Word.

We need also to distinguish between faith and presumption. The line that divides these two is very fine, but it marks the boundary between success and disaster.

Presumption contains an element of self-glorification and human arrogance. It is the assertion of man’s will, even if it is cloaked in spiritual language. Faith, on the other hand, is totally dependent on God, and its outworking will always glorify God. It never takes the initiative away from God.

We come back to the words of Paul: such faith is “not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8–9). Its attitude is summed up by John the Baptist.

A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.
—JOHN 3:27

Very simply stated, faith *receives*, and presumption *grabs*.

Expressed by Confession

We come now to another important feature of scriptural faith. We have already considered the words of Paul in the first half of Romans 10:10.

With the heart one believes to righteousness.

In the second half of this verse, Paul adds:

And with the mouth confession is made to salvation.

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