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## "Vineyard of the Lord"

*submitted*

Isa. 5: 7 For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant: and He looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.

"The lesson from this passage is clear. It is possible to become so familiar with the routine of religious exercises that, while outwardly conformed to what has been learnt from Scripture, real heart devotion to Christ Himself has waned; the first love has been lost, and with it true spiritual power. The declension may open the way for grosser forms of evil, and the Lord has to stand in the door and knock, waiting for a response from any who really desire to enjoy communion with Him, and real conformity to His will and way."

W.E. Vine on Isaiah 5: 7

Whether we apply the truths of Isaiah 5: 1-7 to our individual life, our household, or the assembly of which we form a part, we do well to recognize it as "His vineyard". After all that He has done in seeing that it might be fruitful and a blessing to all, let us gauge it by this verse. Where He looks for judgment is there oppression? Where He purposes righteousness is there a cry? Has our love for Christ so diminished that we move in cold callousness, claiming to carry out the "teachings" of Scripture (often as we ourselves decide to view them) towards others in

such a way that instead of justice there is oppression of those same, who are indeed Jehovah's "choicest vine"? Instead of the joy and peace of righteousness (James 3) do the ears of the Lord hear the cry of those who are downtrodden and cast aside? Is there behind us a trail strewn with the wreckage of God's own children who are oppressed and crying as a result of our misuse and abuse of divine things? Let it be an alarm to us, indeed an awakening and life-changing alert, that if, in His vineyard, which He designed, prepared, and planted, these wild grapes are being borne instead of the fruit which He intended, we must stop! We must repent! We must confess before the Lord, and we must seek restoration of our own heart and reparations towards others, before the Lord of the vineyard brings upon us woe, and we stand before Him in accountability (Matt. 21: 40).

## Spiritual Growth, pt 3

*Robert Surgenor*

### West Virginia Hunters

Many of my days have been spent on a farm in West Virginia. Many times we feast on a good meal of venison. Here's how it happens. There are a number of sons who are skillful hunters. The cross hairs are put on the deer, the trigger is squeezed, the deer falls. What good would that deer be if it was just left in the woods to rot? There would be no profit. Immediately after being killed, that deer is skinned and cut into pieces, and refrigerated. Later, a good portion, which was taken in hunting, is carefully placed in the oven, roasted, and then served on a platter for a luscious meal. Those hunters were not slothful, and many benefited as a result. Let me move this to a spiritual realm.

### Embarrassing Questions

I have talked with people who have recently attended a Bible conference. Upon asking them about the conference they have said, "Oh, it

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was wonderful, a really good conference." Then I have asked them; "What preachers were there?" and with a little thought, they have given me their names. Then I have said; "What did brother so-and-so preach about?" Often, the person frowns, seeking frantically to say something, but alas, they seemingly don't remember his subject, except to say, "He was really good." I counter; "But what did he teach you?" The old saying is, that silence is golden, but in such a case as this, it certainly isn't golden, it is rather embarrassing. In other words, there are Christians that drive miles and miles to a conference, and return home none the wiser. What good is a conference if you're not ingesting and assimilating "spiritual growth" food? Ask yourself, when you are exposed to healthy spiritual food, are you like the Bereans? They "searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." (Acts 17:11).

After the conference, or even after an assembly ministry meeting, do you, when time permits, open your Bible, and go over everything the teaching brother gave you? Do you search it out? Do you investigate it? If not, why? This lazy attitude and behavior is termed, "dull of hearing." The preacher spends hours, if not days, toiling over the scriptures to feed the saints, only to have them too lazy to study afterwards what he has taught. This is very disappointing to a faithful, toiling minister. I suspect that there are many "dull of hearing" saints in our assemblies today, and this is one of the reasons why so many assemblies are becoming frail and unproductive. Paul said to the Galatian saints; "Ye did run well; who did hinder you" (Gal. 5:7).

The reverse of this is found in 1 Peter 1:5-10: "And beside this, giving all diligence (the opposite to slothfulness), add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged

from his old sins."

## Teachers

Paul reprimands them; "Ye ought to be teachers." He is not referring to what we would term "a pulpit preacher." What Paul is saying is that at this stage of their Christian experience they should have the ability to teach others. If you have known Christ for a year or so, you ought to be a teacher of Christ. We all ought to know Him so well that we can have no difficulty in teaching others of Him. It is not a question of the gift of teaching here, it is that spiritual faculty of being able to make known to others a Person who is well known to ourselves. As Peter and John stood before the council, notice their testimony. "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). If there is the savor of Christ in your heart, a deep seated knowledge of Him, you will say the same.

My friends, take a close look at the Thessalonian saints. Saved no more than a few weeks, and what is the report? Take careful notice! "For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing" (1 Thess. 1:8). These saints were in love with Christ, and you couldn't shut their mouth. They thundered out the gospel to all about them. They knew Christ, thus the ability to make Him known to others.

After being saved 29 years, Paul exclaimed; "That I may know Him" (Phil. 3:10). There was always a quest in his heart for a deeper, more intimate knowledge of Christ. From the day of his conversion, to the day of his home call, he was a growing saint.

J.N. Darby's rendering of verse 14 is: "But solid food belongs to full-grown men, who, on account of habit, have their senses exercised for distinguishing both good and evil."

Take the home for instance. It should be a Christian seminary. If the O.T. fathers had the responsibility to teach their children the scriptures, how much more in the N.T. "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and

when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6:6-7). Parents are required of God to have the ability to teach their children Biblical truths. The word "ought" indicates that it is their duty, their obligation. God demands it! Older sisters also have an obligation to teach. "The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed" (Titus 2:3-5). Their teaching is domestic and personal, not public.

Christians are indebted to the unsaved to "teach" them the way of salvation, and they are obligated to answer any intelligent question a sinner may ask them about salvation. If you were approached by a sincere sinner and asked if Jesus was truly God, could you give them an intelligent answer from the scriptures? If you were asked what justification, redemption, or sanctification meant, could you open your Bible and give them an intelligent, scriptural answer? This is your spiritual obligation. If not able, then perhaps you are like these Hebrews, dull of hearing, still immature and still in the milk stage. That expression, "useth milk" infers that milk was their only diet. There is nothing wrong with milk. Full grown saints still use milk, but that is not their only food; they also enjoy "strong meat," that is, the deeper and more advanced truths of God's word.

Those who cannot ingest anything stronger than milk are still babes, immature Christians. They have never grown, and are "unskilful in the word of righteousness." That expression, "the word of righteousness" defines the scriptures that deal with the subject of righteousness, such as we have in the epistles to the Romans and Galatians. An undeveloped Christian cannot give you a summary of such truths. He is unskilful. You may as well ask a two-year-old to solve an algebraic equation, as to expect an intelligent explanation of gospel related truths from a spiritual babe.

These Hebrews were in need of being taught the first principles of the oracles of God.

To understand the primary and fundamental principles of God's word is vital to spiritual growth. Until these are grasped by faith and the heart and life influenced by them, that person is not ready for further teachings in God's word. These Hebrews had been so engrained in Jewish teachings, that when their hearts grew cold to Christ, they developed a desire to return to the Temple with all its ritual and ordinances. They had lost sight of a Christ in the glory, thus the teaching valuable to Christians no longer held their attention -- they became dull of hearing.

Most Christians today have not had to be delivered from Judaism, but as Gentiles, we have been delivered from this present evil world. Consequently, if our hearts grow cold to Christ, there will be the tendency to return to the world, and become dull of hearing.

### **Those of Full Age**

In Hebrews 5:14, we read of those of "full age." That is, they have grown up, they are fully developed. To them, "strong meat" belongeth to them. In other words, they have progressed to the deeper and more profound teachings of scripture. Yes, they would also enjoy the milk of the word presenting the cross and our Lord's offering for our sins, His burial, resurrection, and ascension to God's right hand. But they would also enjoy, and assimilate the truths connected with His Person, such as His varied glories, His Melchizedek priesthood, the glory of His coming kingdom, and of Old Testament truths portraying Him in types and shadows. By feasting daily on advanced truths, their senses would develop to discern both good and evil. This would preserve them from being like "children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." (Eph. 4:14). That expression, "by reason of use" (Heb. 5:14), refers not to an occasional effort, but to a continual practice, a firmly established habit. The good and the evil refer to the scriptures. Peter speaks of those wresting the scriptures to their own destruction (2 Pet.3:16). Producing wrong doctrine by twisting the scriptures is bad. The mature saint is able to discern what is right and what is wrong. One dull of hearing and still a babe, can be easily carried about

with false teachings. They are like a ship on a stormy sea without a rudder.

"Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment" (Heb. 6:1-2).

The theme of the Hebrew Epistle is the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. The word "therefore" links us directly with what has been said in 5:11-14. The apostle had rebuked them for their laziness and lack of growth. They had not grasped the fact that Judaism was temporary, and that its types and shadows only pointed to Christ, and having served that purpose, Judaism was no longer needed. The shadows had given way to the Substance. "The principles of the doctrine of Christ," that Paul mentions have nothing to do with Christianity, but refer to Jewish teachings and practices. Keeping this in mind will keep one's interpretations accurate. Let us examine them one by one.

The word "leaving" is in the past tense and should read, "having left the word of the beginning of Christ" (J.N.D.). This has reference to what God made known concerning Christ under Judaism. In the O.T. we find prophecies of His coming, and types and figures of the work He would accomplish. These predictions had now been fulfilled upon the coming of Christ into this world. Upon conversion, the Jews had left "the beginning," i.e. the types and shadows, for the real thing - Jesus Christ Himself. "Let us go on unto perfection." Not only full development on their part, but also the full revelation which God has made of Christ in this dispensation. In other words; "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1), and don't be occupied with ordinances of Judaism. Leave it! Paul says. Let us go on to a full apprehension of Christ's glory, be occupied with your great High Priest in heaven, dwell daily upon your blessed portion in Him, is his plea. He tells them in 7:19 that "the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God."

## **Christian Practices, Believer's Baptism, How?**

*Joel Portman*

As with other apostolic teaching that always originated in what Christ Himself taught the apostles, or from Divinely revealed truth, baptism of believers has degenerated. In many cases, it is a ceremony that is considered essential to one's salvation or having meritorious value beyond what the Scriptures teach. Its simplicity and faithful adherence to the pattern that we observe in the New Testament has been changed to accommodate the ideas and teachings of men. Without our needing to consider all the variations of this practice, including sprinkling of infants or adults, pouring, or other forms of altered practices, we want to examine who should be baptized, what baptism is, and how it was practiced.

### **Candidates for Baptism**

Despite claims of certain theologians to the contrary, simple study and understanding of the historical record in Acts never indicates that infants were ever baptized. Some groups attempt to use Acts 16:15 and 16:33 to justify the practice, where we find that Lydia, as well as the jailer in Philippi, were both baptized, she, "and her household," he, "and all his". However, there is no indication that Lydia had children, and her household would likely have included adult servants and companions that were with her and under her care. Likewise, those baptized along with the jailer were those who also were included among those "believing in God with all his house." It is a paltry argument to try to use these as examples to teach infant baptism, when all other doctrinal statements and examples show us that the pattern is that those who had believed in Christ and expressed their desire to adhere to Him were baptized.

In addition, over the years that followed the decease of the apostles and their immediate successors, baptism became the means that many employed to convert pagans to "the faith in Christ" and bring them into the "church fold." It became the accepted means in the Roman Catholic religion to remove original sin, by which they mean the inherent and inherited

nature of sin that we receive from Adam. However, they fail to realize that the nature is unchanged by baptism, nor is any regenerative change effected by the application of water. Whether it be "sin", the inherited nature and tendency to sin, or "sins", the deeds that result from that nature, both are only dealt with by the fully-sufficient work of Christ on the cross. An individual today is not responsible for Adam's sin, nor will he be judged for that sin. God's judgment at the Great White Throne in Rev. 20 is based entirely on the works that proceed from that sinful, inherited nature (Rev. 20:12-13). Notice also the judgment of the living nations at the close of the great tribulation in Matt. 25:31-46, a judgment that is entirely an assessment of the works that manifest the condition of the heart toward Christ. Adam's sin has brought the dominating element of sin and its powerful activity into human nature, but it is not the basis of the judgment. Again Rom. 5:12-21 teaches that the condemnation that came upon all men through Adam's offense is answered in the obedience and effective work of the Savior, which one enters into when genuine faith is placed in Christ. The teaching of the Romish church is that a baby is in a condition of not having sanctifying grace, and that by baptism, it is put into this state. This is an invention that finds its source in tradition and not in Scripture. So those who faithfully follow the teaching of Scripture reject the idea of infants needing to be baptized, or of its ability to accomplish anything of benefit.

One can mark this practically by observing a group of children playing together. By their behavior it is impossible to separate those who have been sprinkled as infants from those who have not. Likewise, it is evident that most adults who were thus sprinkled as infants fail to demonstrate any indication of spiritual life or increased responsiveness to divine truth. So, such an act has failed to bring about any change in "the state of grace."

The question is, "who should be baptized?" We turn to God's holy Word, the only inspired source of information or teaching on spiritual matters, and we learn from the Lord's precept as well as apostolic teaching and practice. We learn from the pattern that they followed in the Acts. From that, we learn that on

the Day of Pentecost, when the Spirit descended to begin His function to continue Christ's work and to advance God's purposes in the His absence, that those who believed Peter's message, having been convicted in their hearts of their sin and turning from their religion to Christ, were baptized (Acts 2:37-41). They were not baptized to bring about the remission of sins (v. 38), but rather because of, or with a view to remission, a usage which some references in the New Testament apply to the word. These were devout men (v. 5), who were receptive to Peter's message and responded with conviction in their hearts. They received his word (v. 41) concerning the national guilt of rejecting and crucifying their Messiah, and realized that, as a result, they were guilty and in great danger. Being baptized signified their new identification with the rejected Christ, but also effectively indicated that they were separating themselves from the sin of the nation, and thus, that sin was remitted or removed from them. Similar language is used in the testimony of the former persecutor, Saul in ch. 22:16 with reference to his multiplied sins of "persecuting Christ" (9:4). (It's important to note that only Jewish people were ever told to be baptized for this purpose).

### **Practice of Baptism**

So we observe that the scriptural pattern for baptism is that those who have believed on Christ and show evidence of genuine faith are to be baptized. It isn't an act that does anything for the candidate so far as adding to his/her salvation, but it is an act that makes publicly clear what has already place. In salvation, that person has been crucified with Christ (Rom. 6, Gal. 2:20), so God sees him identified with His death, and the old man has been crucified (Rom. 6:6). Therefore, the christian recognizes that he should be publicly identified with Him in baptism, which is a symbolic expression of being buried and rising again, living in new life. It is not that this commences that new life, for it began the moment of salvation; rather it demonstrates the commencement of life that has already been accomplished spiritually.

In the Acts, it seems that the pattern was to baptize those who professed faith in

Christ very soon after salvation without waiting. Many reasons could be given for this; one was that the apostles and early brethren possessed a spiritual gift of discernment that isn't operational today. Another is that when one took the public step of public identification with Christ, it was a decisive break from their past life, which would result in opposition and possible persecution, so that it was not taken without genuine reality in one's soul. Even in Acts, Philip mistakenly baptized Simon (Acts 8:13), but Peter discerned that Simon wasn't genuinely saved. However, Philip wasn't reprimanded for doing so, suggesting that mistakes could be made, even in those early church days.

The historic practice of baptism was, according to the Sacred Scriptures, always by immersion of the professing believer. Nothing else would truly express the truth of one's identification with Christ in burial and resurrection. Going under the water of baptism typically shows the experience of the old life being buried, put out of sight, and coming up out of the water is a symbolic display of the truth of resurrection with Christ. There are some passages of our New Testament about which Bible students differ, unsure whether they refer to the baptism of the Holy Spirit or water baptism, such as in Gal. 3:27 or Rom. 6. However, good exposition of the Scriptures shows that any baptism into life is referring to the baptism of the Spirit of God that introduces one into the body of Christ upon salvation. Baptism in identification with His death and resurrection is more clearly linked with physical baptism in water. Even if one differs on this aspect, we recognize that both are an essential part of the New Testament teaching for a believer in Christ.

### **Aberrations of Baptism**

Variations on the practice of immersion are many, including sprinkling (of adults or infants), pouring water on the head on the candidate, immersion three times in water, and many other aberrations of the simple practice of baptizing responsible persons who have clearly trusted Christ as Savior. Arguments are sometimes based on the meaning of the original word "baptize" in Greek, some saying that it doesn't always mean immersion of an article

in a liquid. However, the simple, plain meaning of "baptizo" is "to submerge, immerse, or overwhelm an object in a liquid or other material. In the New Testament, it is only used for this act of baptism of a believer. Other arguments are centered on how 3000 souls were baptized on the Day of Pentecost if the act was immersion, but since there were 120 believers who met in the upper room in Acts 1, there were also many who could baptize. One doesn't need to be an "official of the church" to perform this ordinance. Some argue that the language of Acts 8, when Phillip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch doesn't indicate that he was necessarily immersed, since they "went down bot

of them into the water," and thus the arguments continue. It seems clear, however, that historically, the practice of baptism in the early days of the church age was always of adults, or responsible, professing persons and always involved immersion in water. It was in the Name (singular) of "the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit", and upon the authority of the Lord Jesus (hence the emphasis on this expression in Acts 2:38, 8:16, 10:48). With the gradual departure from the apostolic teaching, that took place in the 2nd and 3rd centuries after Christ, and the introduction of pagans into the church during the times of the emperor Constantine, aberrations of the practice began to be the norm. When it was no longer an act that would bring the possibility of persecution and suffering from others, either Jews or Pagan Gentiles, and was fully acceptable (even favorable) to become a "Christian", such changes were accepted and even promoted.

Far better, as believers professing to adhere to the doctrines and practices of the New Testament, to seek to carry out such principles and precepts that we have without seeking to raise issues that would cause departure in this important ordinance.

Baptism is a divinely taught practice that is linked with salvation, practiced in New Testament times by the evangelists who brought the message of the gospel to various places. It is not an act which brings a person into the spiritual kingdom of God, nor is it the "doorway" to the local assembly (nor the dispensational church). However, it is an essential step of professing obedience to God's Word,

subjection to the lordship of Christ, and public identification with Him in His burial and resurrection. When properly understood by anyone in its implications, further expressions of obedience to divine principles and subjection to Christ in practical living will ensue and be expressed. As a result, the pattern that we read in Scripture is that those who were thus baptized, also sought fellowship in a local assembly of believers, such was manifested by Saul in Acts 9.

It is important that we maintain the desire to be subject to His Word so as to continue to faithfully adhere to its truth until He returns.

Eternity! Eternity! The very writing or hearing of that word is enough to make one dead to the world and alive to God.

George Whitefield

## What is the Harm in it?

*Franklin Ferguson*

This is a remark people often make. Would it not be much more to the point, at a time when craving for something questionable, to reverse it and ask one's self, "What is the good in it?" When we find such questioning arising in our heart, is it not an indication that we are not fully satisfied with God's dear Son and our portion in Him? When God separated Israel of old from the life and bondage of Egypt, and brought them to Himself into the wilderness, He gave them manna fresh every morning to sustain them: man did eat angel's food (Num. 11:4-9; 21:5; Psa. 78:25; John 6:48). Their Redeemer had given them Heaven's best and satisfying portion. Never man before had tasted such food, and nothing else could have been better for them. Yet, they became discontented with the Heavenly provision; their souls got "dried away"; they even "loathed" the manna and wished for some of the old fare of Egypt, and wept because they could not get it!

One may ask, "What is the harm in the fish, cucumbers and melons of the Egyptians?"

"leave alone the strong-tasting things as leeks, onions and garlic. Such as the first three may be all very well in the land of bondage, but this was not God's choice for His pilgrims in the desert; for them He had, literally, bread from Heaven. Satisfaction with Divine provision means happiness; discontent with it means murmuring. So the people murmured.

These lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eyes, and pride of life, are not of the Father but of the world (1 John 2:15-17). Somebody may exclaim, "Oh, you are a killjoy, God means us to enjoy ourselves." But we reply, "Killing what joy?" Certainly not "the joy of the Lord," the "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (Neh. 8:10; 1 Pet. 1:8). These so-called "harmless" things will, sooner or later, hinder a walk with God. Let us avoid them; then we shall have a soul fresh like a watered garden, in which "are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old," for our Beloved (Isa. 58:11; S. of S. 7:13).

Sometimes the question is put in this form: "Where is the Scripture against it?" In all our associations in life, God has written all that He deems needful for our guidance. If a question arises, however, for which there is no direct instruction, then we should inquire of the Lord, and we may be directed to something in the Word that will give an indication of what would be, in that instance, consistent with the will and character of the Lord. The absence of a clear command does not give liberty to do what we may think wise, nor is its omission an implied sanction. Let us observe the silences of God, which may have quite as important bearings as His uttered Voice. Where there is no commandment, neither a principle to guide, then we show our wisdom in leaving the matter quite alone.

## Dwelling together in Unity

*R. M. Goatley*

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity".

Psalm 133:1.

"Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Ephesians 4:3.

**I**n the first scripture, the psalmist is enjoying the satisfying picture of children of God living

and serving God together in unity, and he invites us to enjoy the delightful sight with him. How good and pleasant it is! It could be compared with the pleasure of walking through a beautifully landscaped garden. We can hardly imagine the exquisite beauty of the garden which the Lord God planted in Eden, where the trees were classified as 'pleasant to the sight and good for food.' Genesis 2:8, 9.

Long afterwards, when the children of Israel were near the border of the promised land, Balaam looked down from the mountains of Moab over that vast and orderly camp, and he found the beauty of the sight irresistible. Although he had been hired by the king of Moab to curse them, he was caused by the Spirit of God to exclaim, "How goodly are thy tents O Israel! As gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters" (Numbers 24:5,6). What an impressive sight it must have been!

The psalmist likens such a unity to the precious ointment with which Aaron was anointed. This holy ointment was composed of four fragrant spices skilfully blended with a specified measure of oil, and in the Old Testament, oil is frequently used as a figure of the Holy Spirit. When Paul exhorts us to diligently keep the unity of the Spirit, he first mentions four moral graces that we ought to cultivate:- lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another in love (Eph. 4:2). We know that these are the fruit of the Spirit of God as He works in the hearts of the children of God (Galatians 5:22).

When Aaron was anointed, the ointment ran down upon his beard to the skirts of his garment. The word 'skirts' here is really in the singular, and translates a Hebrew word that appears three times in Exodus 28:31, 32, as 'hole'. Here we learn that the high priest's garment was made of one woven work, with this hole in the top for his head to pass through, and it was strengthened with a special binding around it 'that it be not rent.' Just as those four fragrant spices mingled with oil flowed down onto that symbol of specially guarded unity, so we must be diligent to manifest those four moral graces in the power of the Spirit, so that the unity of the Spirit can

be kept.

Both Matthew and Mark record an occasion when the high priest's garment was rent. Face to face with the Lord Jesus, Caiaphas resolutely rejected His sovereign claims, and purposely and forcefully rent his garment. Likewise today, when members choose to reject the sovereign claims of our Lord Jesus Christ, they rend the unity of the assembly.

When Paul teaches about keeping the unity of the Spirit he directs our attention to seven related realities, involving the Persons of the Godhead (Eph. 4:4-6).

The first three give prominence to the Holy Spirit; "there is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling" (v.4). This body, comprising all believers of this church age, came into being at Pentecost (Acts 2) with the descent of the Holy Spirit, when in one Spirit we were all baptised into one body (see I Cor.12:13). Hence we find Paul speaking of "the Church which is His Body" (Eph. 1:22, 23). The members of this body share one glorious hope; "When Christ our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory" (Col.3:4). This hope and this unity are unassailable, for they have come into existence through the operation of the Holy Spirit in response to the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ to His Father in John 17:20-23.

The second three, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism" (v.5), give prominence to the Lord Jesus, and they relate to the sphere of our present responsibility here in church life, where He intends this unity to be enjoyed. The baptism of believers is the symbolic declaration of the union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection which took place at conversion. This union with Christ is the basis of our union with one another. The faith referred to here is "the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), that is, the complete revelation that He has given to us in the Scriptures, and where it is embraced and kept (I Tim. 4:7), it unites believers in a practical way in mind and conduct. The title 'Lord' stresses the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ to direct our lives as He said in Luke 6:46, "Why call ye Me 'Lord, Lord', and do not the things which I say?" Where the force of these three governs our attitude, the unity of the Spirit will be evident,

notwithstanding diversity of gift, and differing degrees of maturity - a spiritual unity that is not to be confused with a lifeless uniformity.

The seventh, "One God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (v.6), brings to us the overarching strength, security and warmth of relationship that is ours in our God and Father Who is above all. We are children in His family. He works His good will toward us through all things, and He has come to live in us. What powerful incentives these seven give to us as we endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

How often this unity is broken by strife and contention, and though the issues involved may be many and varied, Solomon goes to the heart of the matter in Prov. 13:10 - "Only by pride cometh contention." Pride has been called the parent sin. God works in many ways to hide pride from man (Job 33:17), and only He can effectively deal with it (Job 40:12). The language of pride is "I will," and that was the language of Satan when he fell (Isaiah 14:12-14). Ever since our first parents succumbed to his temptation in the garden of Eden it has been the language of every human heart until the will is subdued by the Saviour. In contrast to this, we follow the Prince of Peace into Gethsemane as He set aside His rights for our sakes, and we hear the language of His heart, "Not My will but Thine be done". Well might we remember the words of Paul, "Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus".

Finally, the psalmist in v.3 likens this unity to the dew of Hermon, and the dew that descends on the mountains of Zion. It is on the cloudless nights that are calm and still that the dew falls in all its reviving freshness. When the children of Israel were in the desert, the manna, their bread from heaven, fell with the dew. And so it is in a spiritual sense today. When brethren dwell together in unity, we are able to feed on the true Bread from heaven (John 6:32-58), and be strengthened to serve Him together. How often we pray for blessing, but it may be that we are not giving due weight to this matter of unity. The psalmist says, "For there the Lord commanded the blessing".

(from "Wholesome Words, #282)

## Caesar's or God's?

A. W. Tozer

One thing must be kept in mind: We Christians are Christians first and everything else after that. Our first allegiance is to the kingdom of God. Our citizenship is in heaven. We are grateful for political freedom. We thank God for democracy as a way of life. But we never forget that we are sons of God and citizens of another city whose builder and maker is God. For this reason, we must not identify the gospel with any political system or make Christianity to be synonymous with any form of government, however noble. Christ stands alone, above and outside of every ideology devised by man. He does not join any of our parties or take sides with any of our great men except as they may come over on His side and try to follow Him in righteousness and true holiness. Then He is for them, but only as individuals, never as leaders of some political faction. The true Christian will be loyal to his country and obedient to those in authority, but he will never fall into the error of confusing his own national culture with Christianity. Christianity is bigger than any country, loftier than any civilization, broader than any human ideology.

**Faithfulness and Ability are both absolute requirements for public service for God.**

Philip Harding

## Secret of a Godly Testimony

Damon W. Fales, of Boston, when asked the secret of how he maintained a godly testimony all these years, said, "There are four things to be cherished:

- 1st. A tender Conscience
- 2nd. A single Eye
- 3rd. A love for God's Word
- 4th. Time spent in prayer"

In his own life he sought to observe these four things: and though his was a busy life, and not by any means free from trial, yet

it was a life savory with the sweet savor of Christ. There are many who bear the name "Christian," who have very little of the likeness of Christ, and when they pass away one has the feeling that it is best not to say much about their testimony, but he who seeks to observe these things cannot but win the respect of all. It is said concerning Stephen, "*Devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him,*" (Acts 8:2).

"A tender conscience." How many have made shipwreck by putting away a good conscience! The business world abounds in temptations; the social world caters to the pride of life; the religious world offers its seductions, and if a man is to escape shipwreck he must pay strict heed to that sensitive monitor, the conscience. If it be disregarded in little things, it will soon be disregarded in great things: and at last become as if seared by a hot iron. Let us keep a tender conscience.

"A single eye." Where the eye is single the whole body will be full of light. When the eye is fixed on the Master and the heart resolved to follow Him wherever He may lead, then we walk safely, otherwise we stumble in the darkness. No man can serve two masters. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. O for a single eye!

"A love for God's word." This is the only chart for life's voyage. Every sunken rock is listed: the safe channel is marked. Dangers are on every hand. We need constant guidance. The word is more necessary than our daily food. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Oh, for a deeper love for the word of God.

"Time spent in prayer." Ask and yet shall receive. Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you. Lord teach us how to pray!

**THE ONLY AUTHORITY TO DISOBEY A LAW OF THE COUNTRY IS NOT WHEN MY RIGHTS HAVE BEEN DENIED, BUT WHEN GOD'S RIGHT IS DENIED.**