

Index of Articles

	Page
Jonah, pt. 13	1
Epistle of Jude, pt. 2	3
Altars of the Bible, pt. 2	5
The Lord's Supper, concluded	6
Hands of the Lord Jesus	9
The Light Thereof	10

Jonah, Part 13

Steve Walvatne

The Mercy

"And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that He had said that He would do unto them; and He did it not" (3:10).

In our last paper we witnessed Nineveh's response to Jonah's preaching. Now our focus turns heavenward, to where we find God's estimate of things. The concerned query of verse 9 is met with the marvelous mercy of verse 10. Our current portion depicts God mercifully,

1. Reviewing Nineveh's Case
2. Repenting Nineveh's Condemnation
3. Reprieving Nineveh's Citizens

Reviewing Nineveh's Case

So wretched was Nineveh's record that we're told in chapter 1, it arose to the throne of God. The Assyrian city had treasured up to itself, "wrath against the day of wrath" (Romans 2:5), and the moment of accounting drew near. After Jonah proclaimed words of warning throughout Nineveh's precincts, the Lord mercifully reviewed their case. We read that He "saw their works." Nothing escaped His all-seeing eye, even those movements occurring from within. What did they show? That the Ninevites "turned from their evil way." Mercy was thus gained, not through TRICKERY, but through TRUTH, a quality frequently paired with mercy. Consider for example, Psalm 85:10; 89:14; 98:3; 100:5; 115:1; Proverbs 3:3; 14:22; 16:6; 20:28; 28:13; Isaiah 16:5; and Hosea 4:1. Without truth, there's no mercy. Sometimes troubled souls desire salvation and we wonder why they remain lost, but there is no such mystery with God. He probes the heart, detecting the honesty or lack thereof, in every person. Those that are genuine like the publican in Luke 18:13, find mercy and go on their way justified. Others remain unchanged.

The Ninevites "turned from" their evil way. That was repentance, an important aspect of salvation. It deserves a primary place in all gospel preaching, though sadly, it is frequently omitted in pulpits today. More than a change of mind, Scriptural repentance is the sinner agreeing with God against himself. "The entrance into the Kingdom," wrote Oswald Chambers, "is through the panging pains of repentance crashing into a man's respectable goodness" ("My Utmost for His Highest"). Nineveh, in Jonah's day, felt those pangs and turned, while favored Israel would not hearken, a fact sure to have burdened Jonah's heart. Repeatedly, however, Israel was encouraged to repent. Ezekiel, for instance, beseeched them, saying, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (33:11). A similar sentiment was uttered by the Saviour in Matthew 23: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (vv. 37-38). Said Paul, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Romans 10:1). But alas! favored circumstances are no guarantee of mercy.

Repeating Nineveh's Condemnation

Behind the scenes, God's mercy was acting towards Nineveh long before they realized it. Our first clue comes in chapter 1 with God's call to Jonah, and then again in chapter 3, when the prophet was commissioned a second time and given the contents of his message. Though the summons contained little else than judgment, the very fact that God sent a judgment preacher to Nineveh with it, was by itself,

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a display of mercy. Some fail to realize that and mistakenly think that those preaching sin and judgment are hard and insensitive, but nothing is further from truth. Without clear and consistent declarations on sin and its consequences, lost souls remain unstirred and disinterested in eternal salvation. Judgment preaching was Nineveh's route to repentance and relief, "the very thing that [God's] threatenings were intended to produce" (George Young: "Lectures on the Book of Jonah").

When the people repented of their evil way, we're informed that "God repented of the evil that He had said that He would do unto them." The word "repented" as applied to God, is really inadequate. Certainly no thought of personal error or sin can attach to its meaning when it's linked to Him. Some translators prefer "relented" instead, because it emphasizes compassion over contrition, better than the word "repented" does. Still, neither is exact. We agree with J.A. Poseck who says, "The Spirit of God condescends to express Himself after the human way of speaking, on account of our infirmities" ("The Bible Treasury, vol. 17"). And as George Young states, it "merely denotes a change in [God's] dispensations, not an alteration of His purpose." H.L. Ellison adds, "When He does not do what He said He would, we as finite men can say only that He has changed His mind or repented, even though we should recognize as Jonah did (4:2), that He had intended or desired this all along" ("The Expositor's Bible Commentary"). Verses like Numbers 23:9 – "God is not a man that He should lie; neither the son of man that He should repent..." – or Malachi 3:6 – "For I am the Lord, I change not" – are in no way contradictory to what we have here. Some find the following illustration from Samuel Burn helpful:

Observe the thermometer. Would you describe it as changeable or unchangeable? It is certainly changeable, for the mercury it contains is sometimes above fever of heat and sometimes below freezing point. But it is just as certainly unchangeable, for it always indicates the temperature to which it is exposed; the mercury rising as the weather gets warmer, and falling as surely as it gets colder. The action of the instrument is invariable in its character and yet action itself involves change...Change takes place in the Most High not because He is changeable, but because He is unchangeable ("The Prophet Jonah").

While many things pertaining to divine Persons are "too wonderful" for us (Psalms 139:6), it dare not be doubted that God's prerogative to "change" as He sees men change, is wholly consistent with His righteous character. This principle was delivered to Jeremiah in chapter 18:7-10: "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation against whom I have pronounced

turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in My sight, that it obey not My voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them."

Reprising Nineveh's Citizens

God granted to Nineveh something Nineveh rarely bestowed on its neighbors. He mercifully gave them a reprieve from judgment. Historians have documented the brutal nature of Assyria's army and the ruthless spirit that permeated the kingdom as a whole. They never hesitated to make gruesome examples of their opposition. "I cut off their throats like sheep," boasted one Assyrian monarch. And another named Ashurnasirpal, asserted with equal pride, "I cut off their heads; I burned them with fire; a pile of living men and of heads over against the city gate I set up; men I impaled on stakes; the city I destroyed...I turned it into mounds and ruin heaps..." (www.factsanddetails.com). The English poet Lord Byron, referenced their ardor in his poem, "The Destruction of Sennacherib," by writing,

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on
the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple
and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars
on the sea
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep
Galilee.

But presently, these were the people that wilted before Jonah's great preaching. Fearless in the face of human onslaught, they quaked at thoughts of divine conquest. Bowing to heaven's authority, they experienced heaven's mercy. Their reprieve is stated simply – "He did it not." The overthrow He vowed to "do" ("asah", #6213), He "did" ("asah", #6213) it not. How liberating was the Almighty's reprieve to the condemned city! Fasting ended, sackcloth was discarded, both people and animals went back to their haunts.

Centuries later, perishing souls who bow Nineveh-like before the God of heaven, still find mercy. Not a temporal mercy only, but an eternal mercy; a mercy "drawn from Immanuel's veins." Those graciously reprieved, rejoice in the One that is "RICH IN MERCY" (Eph. 2:4). How they thrill to sing:

By God's Word at last my sin I learned;
Then I trembled at the law I'd spurned,
Till my guilty soul imploring turned
To Calvary.

Mercy there was great, and grace was free;
 Pardon there was multiplied to me;
 There my burdened soul found liberty,
 At Calvary!

William Newell
(continued)

The wise Christian never dictates to God, but reads His Word and believes it. He watches His providence and acquiesces in it; strives with his own corruption and selfishness, and endeavors always to say, "Thy will be done."

Jude, Pt. 2

Counsel and Caution

Joel Portman

Perhaps Jude's short epistle hasn't received the attention that it deserves in most commentaries. That may be because the theme of his burden is difficult to handle, or because of its direct application to conditions of the last days of church testimony. It certainly contains truth that is appropriate to our day, and deals with conditions that were anticipated by Paul (2 Thessalonians 2, 1 Timothy 4:1-3, 2 Timothy 3:1-13) and Peter as well in 2 Peter 2. What the Spirit revealed to them concerning coming conditions and events has become a reality in Jude's epistle. That tells us that the conditions of apostasy began early in the history of the church and have accelerated, so that what we observe in the religious climate of our world today is only the culmination of the anticipated degeneration. Thus, the inroads of modernism, liberalism, humanism, agnosticism, and other "isms" that exist within Christendom should not surprise us. It has been said that God's power is more clearly manifest at the beginning of any dispensation, but the power of the devil is seen more definitely at the end. We live in such days and under such conditions today. May the Lord grant us discernment and desire to recognize what is of God and what is not, so that we may be preserved unto the coming of the Lord.

Jude's burden concerns the preservation of the saints under such conditions. He employs the thought of being preserved a number of times in the epistle. In v. 1, he speaks of the saints being "preserved in/for Christ Jesus" by God's power, so that there is a present preservation that believers experience. He ends in v. 24 by reminding us that

He is able to keep (preserve) the believers and present them before God's presence with exceeding joy, so preservation is with a view to the future. He reminds his readers in v. 6 of angels who "kept not" their habitation who are now being "kept" with a view to eternal judgment. Finally, he exhorts believers to "keep" (preserve) themselves in the love of God through exercise of soul and continued appreciation of the love of God expressed toward them. This preservation is not passive, but includes the active involvement of the saints by the power of God to keep themselves and continue to make progress spiritually. May we be kept and preserved in faithful devotion to our absent Lord until the moment of His return and not be like the angels who, through dissatisfaction and deceit of the devil, were cast down and lost their position of being in God's presence.

Jude is not a random collection of thoughts with no organization; one can recognize a definite order in its development. It is not a simple outline of truth hastily gathered together, but rather it presents a carefully developed presentation of warnings and encouragement against the background of examples from the Old Testament. S. Maxwell Coder's book on Jude ("Everyman's Bible Commentary") presents an outline of Jude that is helpful to show the arrangement of his material. In this, one can see that even though he felt an urgent need to write to warn and exhort believers, what he wrote was carefully considered and guided by the Holy Spirit of truth so that he would effectively expose error.

Purpose for the Epistle (v. 3-4)

Urgency of His Concern (v. 3)

Addressing the saints with genuine love as "beloved" would indicate his affection for them. More, it would refresh their hearts to know that they are beloved of the Lord, since the word indicates that they are also God's beloved ones. The expression also reinforces his attitude toward them which would assure them that his strong words of warning are not due to his lack of love or concern for them. This reminds us that any corrective ministry or warning words to others should be coupled with our genuine expressions of love for that service. We are to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15, 1 Corinthians 13).

Jude's purpose had been to write a carefully composed and cogent presentation of truth that pertained to the salvation that all saints enjoy ("common," as shared among all), but the Spirit impressed upon his spirit that he must write to exhort the saints to be alert and to contend defensively for "the faith" that had been "once for all" delivered to the saints. Peter writes in similar terms in 2 Peter 1:15, when he seeks to support the saints by giving basic principles that lead them to the Word of God ("endeavor" is "giving diligence"). Although his exercise was to write urgently on the intended subject, we see in his change of mind an indication of the superintendence and control of the

Holy Spirit over that which has been written in the inspired Word. Some approach the Holy Scriptures as if they were the result of man's devising and personal desire, rather than recognizing that the writers were subject to the Spirit's control. Peter reminds us that the holy men who wrote the Scriptures were "moved (born along) by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21).

It was "needful" indicates that he sensed an inward compulsion to change his subject to write that which follows. The tense of the second word "write" indicates that it had to be done then, at that time, rather than waiting until he had more leisure. Nearing the close of this epistle, he reminds them to "remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ," (v. 17). "The Faith" embodies the entire sphere and content of doctrinal teaching that the apostles had given to the church. Apostolic doctrine comprises the entirety of the truth that is essential for the spiritual lives and welfare of the believers. There is always a great need for the teaching of basic doctrines in a systematic way so that the believers know "what" they believe. Doctrine is not stimulating to the flesh nor appealing to the superficial Christian, but it is the solid meat of the Word that stabilizes and sustains the child of God in the midst of changing conditions and opposition to the truth.

It is "the faith once for all delivered unto the saints," since there will not be another "faith" to supplant it. We have received in the Holy Scriptures the entire body of doctrinal truth that God intends to give us by His Spirit, so that those who profess to receive "new" revelations, are only pretending that their "revelations" have any value as compared with the entire Word of God. There are those who claim new revelations that are from sources other than the Spirit of Truth, and they are used to lead ignorant people astray. Christians have had to contend with such deviations from the truth of God throughout centuries of history, and that need to be warned is no less today.

Jude says that this body of truth has been delivered to the saints, or entrusted to them to guard and keep intact from all inroads of opposition to it. To do this, he says, we must "contend." This word is only used here in the New Testament, and it means to put out "vigorous, intense, determined struggle to defeat the opposition," (Kenneth Wuest). This defense of truth is no light matter to be careless about, since God has placed such value and emphasis on it; we should do no less, guarding these precious truths lest they slip away and be lost from our use. Reiteration and repetitive teaching of the principles of the Word will guard younger and older believers from the deceitfulness of error and establish them on right principles. It will also give the reasons for scriptural practices that they should exhibit in their lives. In addition, one cannot contend for truth that he or she is not practicing! Part of contending is the display of the reality of what we learn

from the Holy Scriptures, so that we cannot, and dare not, decide for ourselves what we will or won't practice. Defense of truth demands consistency in the life.

Reality of His Concern (v. 4)

Jude evidently knew of the men about whom he writes ("certain men"), those who have "slipped in by a side door," ("Vincent Word Studies"). Evidently his readers didn't recognize them clearly, but he and others did. This is the responsibility of godly elders in local assemblies; they are to be pastors who are guarding the flock. Paul warns the Ephesian elders of this in Acts 20:28-30. These hadn't come in the front door boldly, giving clear evidence of who they were; rather they had crept in and were among the saints, hiding their true colors and seeking to deceive the gullible, even using Scriptural terminology and acceptable words, but meaning something different from the truth of God's Word in so doing. Many cults use the Scriptures as we do, but when they use words, they attach a different definition to those words. So you and they may be saying the same thing but meaning something totally different. They are deceptive, and most cults and heresies have been characterized by using this method. These individuals are those who occupy many pulpits in churches today, or have settled down alongside others in church pews, but have no real spiritual life. Jude describes them in vivid detail (v. 12-13).

Men like these are apostates. They have totally and definitely denied the truth that they once professed to believe. They are not simply indifferent to the Word, nor does this term apply to those who have fallen into error or been affected by some form of heresy. Those may be saved, even though led astray. An apostate has never received divine life, though he or she has had light. They are like those in the parable of the sower and seed in Matthew 13, and are like the seed that fell on the stony ground. Luke says that it represents those who receive the seed but in time of temptation "fall away," (Luke 8:13). Luke uses the verbal form of "apostasy" to describe these men who are like that seed. These have denied the faith, denying the only Lord God and Lord Jesus Christ (v. 4).

These have been written down of old, not meaning that what they were doing was predetermined, but rather that the Word of God had predicted that these men would come in, and showing clearly what God's judgment would be on such individuals. Enoch prophesied of "these," (v. 14-15), as also did other Old Testament prophets, as well as our Lord Jesus Christ. They have been typified also by those who were like them, who received the judgment of God. Balaam, v. 11, that false prophet, is an example of these. He had light in spiritual things, but never had received life. He perished with the ungodly who were enemies of Israel.

Jude gives three characteristics of apostates: they are ungodly first of all. This means that they are "destitute of reverential awe toward God, impious," (Wuest Word

Studies). This is the stem of all the other characteristics, a wrong attitude toward God that doesn't give Him the place that is rightfully due to Him, neither recognizes a proper relationship with Him. Man's thoughts of God will affect every aspect of his behavior. Romans 1:19-32 traces the downward pathway of man into the morass of moral iniquity, beginning with his failure to desire the knowledge of God. Moral evil and corrupt behavior will always ensue in any society that denies God's authority and rejects the knowledge of His ways (Job 21:14, 22:17).

These men changed God's grace into an excuse for unbridled living. Someone has said that an evidence that the gospel is entirely of grace, is that such individuals could change the meaning of grace into an excuse to live licentiously, using Romans 5:20. They forget the words of Paul in Romans 6:1, or Titus 2:11-14, emphasizing that the grace of God teaches us "that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world." The attitude that a Christian is free to do whatever he wants, go wherever he wants, or pursue whatever activities please him is false to the truth of grace. This is antinomianism, and has plagued the church from its beginning because of the natural tendencies of man to corrupt all that is of God or which expresses His purpose.

They denied the Person and Authority of the ONLY Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. All truth that pertained to His deity, humanity, authority, His position as Savior and Messiah was denied by these men. These are the marks of an unbeliever, one who has no divine life and no relationship with Christ. John says that "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father," (1 John 2:22, 23). Such men abound in our world today, and we see that present conditions reveal to the observant believer a deliberate, outright and open rejection of Scripture, truth, and Divine authority that is an earmark of a society that has abandoned God, religiously and secularly. It is a world that is under God's judgment that will soon fall on it. The pathway of a Christian in this environment is to follow Jude's brother's words, "keep himself unspotted from the world," (James 1:27).

Jude follows this by giving specific examples of these three expressions of apostasy in his epistle. That will follow in the next article.

(continued)

Just as colored glass imparts its own tint to the light that passes through it, so truth falling upon a prejudiced mind, is blurred and perverted. The simple, artless, child-like spirit can alone receive the Word of God in its purity. Things hidden from the wise and prudent are revealed unto babes.

Altars of the Bible, pt. 2 **The Brotherly Altar (by implication)**

Alcímides Velasco

(From "La Sana Doctrina," #291)

On the altar sacrifices of sweet savor and offerings for sin were offered. The first were voluntary and devotional. The second ones procured pardon and restoration of fellowship. In these offerings, the offerer was sure that God accepted the sacrifice, on the basis of sincere repentance, through previous adjustment of the sin and on the basis of the restitution of the debt. If these conditions were not complied with, the sacrifice was offered in vain and it fell to the ground as an empty ritual. The great Lord reprimanded the nation of Israel for this serious fault: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me, saith the Lord? . . . bring no more vain oblations. . . Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doing. . . Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." (Isaiah 1:11, 13, 16, 17). The Lord preserve us, brethren, from simple religious orthodoxy, from ritualistic formalism and from the exterior appearance without the interior reality.

Our passage under consideration says, ". . . if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." (Matthew 5:23-24). We will notice some lessons from this passage:

1. The Scriptural Perception

"If thou bringest thy gift to the altar. . ." Until this point, the offerer had theoretically complied with the requirements of the Ceremonial Law. The person had left his house with an adequate offering. They all had learned, since they were children, to know and memorize the Sacred Scriptures. The first chapters of the book of Leviticus that deal with the offerings were material that every good Israelite mastered. Every son of Abraham knew the sequence of the steps to follow until the offering was burning on the altar. From what follows, we understand that the case that the Lord plants here wasn't an isolated situation; but, rather, it was a conduct that had become common in the religious actions of normal Israelites; there was more of a ritualistic formality than Scriptural truth and spiritual reality. At the end of the Old Testament, in the book of Malachi, the Lord corrects the people, saying: "I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand," (Malachi 1:10).

Brethren, if we are neglectful and careless, we can also fall into religious formalism. Through mechanically repeating the same accustomed acts every day, we can come to act lightly in sacred things. It is for this reason that the

Scripture says, “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.” (Ecclesiastes 5:1).

The Lord reprimanded the church in Sardis, saying to them: “thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. (Revelation 3:1-2). In Laodicea, things had deteriorated so very much little by little, until the Lord was outside of this assembly; and he said to them, “I will vomit you out of my mouth,” and at the end He warns them, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.” (Revelation 3:14, 18). Oh brethren, the Lord guard us from every formalistic routine!

2. The Spiritual Illumination

It was while he was standing at the altar that the man who brought the offering remembered that his brother had something against him. The psalmist says, “I will wash mine hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar, O LORD,” (Psalm 26:6). Undoubtedly it was the impression made by the God of the altar that awakened his soul. It was revealed to him that something was wrong inside. Likewise it happened to Isaiah; in Isaiah 5, he was lamenting with sad “ayes” about the evil condition of the people. Later, in chapter 6, he was found in the temple, near the altar. Being there, he received a vision of the holiness of the throne of God. In view of the light received, he exclaimed, “Woe is me.”

It wasn't the miracle in himself, (the miraculous catch of fish), that made Peter fall to his knees, confessing his condition within, but it was the realization that he was in the presence of the Lord, who had the power to work miracles (Luke 5:8).

From what is said in Leviticus 10:9, it is inferred that Nadab and Abihu were under the influence of wine. They were supposed to take a coal from the Altar of Burnt Offering and carry it to the Altar of Incense; however, they deliberately didn't do so, but they offered strange fire that the Lord never had commanded them. And there went out fire from before the Lord, and they died (Leviticus 10:1-2). If in their actual condition, they had done the correct thing, passing by the Altar of Burnt Offering first, it is implied that the judgment of God would have been avoided, for in the light of the Altar, their sin would have been recognized and confessed.

There we have a solemn lesson; if we are in the presence of God—it might be in a meeting, while praying or reading the Holy Book—we are reprimanded for something evil that we have done in our lives and we don't confess it but rather harden ourselves, we will be inevitably exposed to disciplinary action (1 Corinthians 11:31; Proverbs 29:1).

3. The Brotherly Reconciliation

This man, in the light he received, had to leave his offering before the altar, and go to be reconciled with his brother, and then he would return to present his offering. To the God of the altar, the interior condition of the offerer is more important than the exterior condition of the offering. The sacrifice could be perfect ritually, but if his heart wasn't perfect toward his brother, the offering wasn't accepted.

When Jacob secretly left Padan-aram, Laban pursued him for seven days with evil intentions. In the night prior to the meeting with his son-in-law, God came to Laban in a dream and told him, “Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad.” (Genesis 31:24). Things were finally adjusted between them. It was after they made a pact of reconciliation, that Jacob “offered sacrifice upon the mount, and called his brethren to eat bread: and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mount.” (Genesis 31:54).

It is a biblical principle to make brotherly adjustments before presenting ourselves to offer in the holy things. It is sad to have to say that this principle has been broken in the past, and is also violated in our days.

Elkanah was accustomed to come to Shiloh yearly with his family to offer sacrifices to the Lord of Hosts. It was a contradiction that Peninnah, with her shocking attitude toward Hannah, participated in the sacrifices of the altar. It was the result of the evil conditions in the tabernacle of the Lord in those days. The priests, the sons of Eli, were putting a stumbling block before the people, and the result was that “men abhorred the offering of the LORD.” (1 Samuel 2:17).

In Corinth, the assembly was divided into factions. Sadly, some were participating in the holy things in this kind of condition. The apostle says, “For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep” (1 Corinthians 11:29-30).

We see the same with Euodius and Syntyche in the assembly in Philippi. They were not of the same mind in the Lord. When the apostle knew of this disagreement, he could foresee bad results; and he begs a third brother to intervene as a mediator (Philippians 4:2-3). If we are not considerate of our marriage partners, along with the issue of our prayers being hindered (1 Peter 3:7), we are also exposed to God's discipline if we participate in the Lord's Supper or Christian service in this condition.

The Lord guard us, brothers, from failing in the fear of the Lord; rather, “let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.” (Hebrews 10:24).

(to be continued)

The love of God will never do the "second-best" for us, but always the “very best.” “Bring forth the BEST robe and put it on him.” “He should have fed thee with FINEST of the wheat.”

The Lord's Supper, *concluded*

Robert Surgenor

Paul tells them that in eating the bread and drinking the cup they were, in reality making a proclamation as a herald. "Ye do shew the Lord's death." Let us remember, that this function is not a demonstration, or a representation. If that were the case, then he would have said, "Ye do shew forth the Lord's death." Yet brethren quote the verse publicly that way. No, there is no showing forth, but rather a showing, which means "announcing," or "preaching." We preach His death. It is a public declaration by the assembly, and the brother making the "announcement" is representing all in the fellowship. He is acting as their spokesman, and that is why, if he expresses my thoughts, I am to say "amen" at his giving of thanks (1 Corinthians 14:16). "Amen" means that I have made the substance of what was uttered my own.

Corinth was in a sad state, in spite of the fact that they came behind no assembly in gift (1 Corinthians 1:7). A person possessing a spiritual gift does not necessarily guarantee that person to be spiritual. Paul told the assembly, "Ye are yet carnal" (1 Cor. 3:3). A brother may have a tremendous gift of preaching, yet be a carnal man. On the other hand, a man may be spiritual and not able to preach, for the Spirit has given him a different gift. You cannot judge spirituality by gift.

The warning to Corinth is given. Those who partook of the emblems unworthily were "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord," and were eating and drinking judgment to themselves (1 Corinthians 11:27, 29). The judgment is defined in verse 30, "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." The word "weak," is *asthenes*, meaning, "infirm, more feeble, without strength." Perhaps, with effort, they were still able to attend the assembly meetings. The word "sickly" is *arrhotos*, which could indicate a bedridden condition. Then there were those who slept. That is, they had died, and their bodies were sleeping in a grave, awaiting the resurrection.

This judgment had fallen upon them because they had not rightly discerned the Lord's body in partaking of the emblems. They had not appreciated the full significance of the symbols, and what His death had accomplished. They were fit for heaven, being justified by His blood, but they were not fit for the assembly because of their carnality. I have often said that the requirements for being in a scriptural assembly are higher than the requirements for being in heaven.

Just because the judgment of God is not falling upon us in the same measure as it was at Corinth, is no guarantee that the same condition is not prevalent among us today. Whenever God commences a new dispensation, His presence is greater, thus His judgment is more pronounced.

Consider the dispensation of law. At the beginning, Aaron's two sons were immediately slain for offering "strange fire" before the Lord (Leviticus 10). Yet, later on in the same dispensation Eli's sons were committing adultery at the door of the Tabernacle, yet no immediate judgment fell upon them. They carried on their sin for some time before being slain in battle.

Now come to the dispensation of grace. Consider Ananias and Sapphira. They lied unto God and immediately God slew them. We find the same suddenness and severity of judgment at Corinth for their failure in not properly discerning the emblems.

Now then, let's move on in this dispensation of grace, and what do we find today? We find a lessening of the presence of God. Have you ever seen a gospel hall literally shake with the presence of God during a fervent prayer meeting as in Acts 4:31? Why no! Why? Simply because the presence of God is not as prevalent now as it was at the beginning of this dispensation. Brethren today can lie, and can fail to rightfully discern in the emblems the body and blood of the Lord, yet they are not weak or sickly, neither has the Lord slain them. There have been brethren who have secretly committed adultery for months, yet they are not slain by the Lord, nor even physically sick.

William Warke said it was a mercy that the assemblies today did not have the presence of God with them in the same measure as the assemblies had at the commencement of this dispensation, or else many would be dead who are still alive and healthy today.

Considering the prevailing condition at Corinth, Paul writes, "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." This appeal reminds me of David's exclamation. "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24). Do we examine ourselves before attending the Lord's Supper? Do we scrutinize ourselves, proving ourselves with a view to approval? Are we totally sincere with ourselves to see whether or not everything we are doing and thinking is genuine or not? Do we reminisce over our behavior during the past week, and doing so, confess our sins? What is our activity Saturday night as the Lord's Supper draws near? Are we in an attitude of prayer and confession? Are we reading and meditating on the Holy Scriptures, seeking to fill our basket with spiritual firstfruits to offer to the Lord at the Supper? Oh to sit in the circle with believers who have previously examined themselves. How fragrant, and how sweet! But to sit with believers who spend very little time with God, then seek in a mechanical way to worship is most painful indeed. It is enough to dry up one's own soul so that he himself finds it difficult to worship. Ah yes, intellectualism, formalism, mechanical-ism, ritualism, and program-ism, have no rightful place at the Lord's Supper. We are to worship the

Father in spirit and in truth (John 4:23).

If they had judged themselves previously the Lord would not have had to judge them. They had failed, and so God chastened them that they should not be condemned with the world. "With the world" means "along with the world." Afflictions were meant to separate them from the doom of the wicked world.

God inflicted these judgments on them that they might be purified, and enlightened, and recovered from their errors. This is the design of God that we may be recovered to a deeper sense of our need of Him; to holier views of the Lord's Supper; and to a more earnest wish to obtain His favor.

They were exhorted that when they came together to eat the Lord's Supper, to "tarry one for another." In other words, there should be respect one for another, sobriety of self, and perfect order. The Lord's Supper was common for the rich and the poor, and the rich should claim no priority or precedence over the poor.

The chapter finishes with, "And if any man hunger, let him eat at home." This is one of the favorite verses used by brethren that condemn eating a meal inside a gospel hall. There is an old saying that goes like this, "Any verse taken out of context becomes a pretext." Considering the context of this passage, it is dealing with the perversion of the Lord's Supper, by turning it into a love feast. Paul is telling them, that when they gathered together to remember the Lord, they were not to come hungry, expecting to satisfy their physical appetite by gorging themselves with food and wine, and terming such activity "the Lord's Supper." However, as far as eating a meal in the hall, I believe that Scripture condones it. We have already considered the Lord's Supper held on the first day of the week at Troas, but failed to mention that on that occasion, after the emblems were partaken of, what did they do? Why, they listened to Paul preach. Then what? They had a meal in the same location where they broke bread. Notice, "When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten (a common meal), and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed" (Acts 20:11). Imagine, the assembly holding the Lord's Supper, then Paul preaching, then they talked with each other and ate food until the break of day, before he bid them goodbye. How wonderful to see such unity, such love, and such consideration for each other, and for Paul, and those traveling with him. They were not sent away hungry.

In the five portions of Scripture that we have considered, there is a uniqueness connected with each one that is not seen in the others. In Luke 22 we find the Lord physically with them, and a description of the surroundings. In Acts 2, we have the good attitude of the believers, and the association of the Supper with other assembly meetings. Acts 20 reveals the importance of the Supper, and the day of the week when the believers came together to break

bread. 1 Corinthians 10 indicates that one loaf symbolizes that the saints in that local assembly were of one. Also indicated is the attitude expected in giving thanks for the emblems. 1 Corinthians 11 reveals a perversion of the Lord's Supper, and also that the Supper is a public proclamation of the Lord's death.

Let us be clear about certain misconceptions concerning the Lord's Supper. The emblems do not confer a blessing upon those who partake. Christendom speaks of the emblems as sacraments, the word being derived from the Latin word "mysterium," meaning something regarded as possessing a mysterious significance. There is nothing mysterious about the emblems. The word "Eucharist" is also employed, meaning "gratefulness," or, "thanksgiving." However, we do well to stay with Biblical terms.

The breaking of the loaf is not symbolic. The lifting of the loaf when giving thanks for it is foreign to Scripture. The emblems are not miraculously changed into the actual body and blood of the Lord. That heresy is taught by the Roman Catholic Church and is called transubstantiation. It is also taught by the Lutheran Church and is called consubstantiation.

The bread is not to be adored. There is distinctly only one loaf of bread, and one cup of wine used at the Lord's Supper. That is why at some large conferences you will see only one large pitcher on the table. Then after thanks is given for it, the contents are poured into multiple cups for convenient distribution among the partakers. At the Lord's Supper, part of the worship is the giving of one's substance to the Lord. Their offering is reckoned as an offering of a sweet smell. As the container is passed around the circle, ALL have the privilege, and the responsibility to give to the Lord. This includes sisters.

In the past decade or so, there has arisen the idea that since the man is the head of the household, he should put the monetary offering into the container for both himself and his wife. I believe such to be in error. Let me explain. Notice the wording of 1 Corinthians 16:2. "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." The giving was to be habitual, single, methodical, and accordingly. Does that expression, "Let every one of you" mean just males? Do maidens have the privilege to give? Most certainly! They are priests as much as any brother, only commanded to be in silence. Now then, when a maiden marries, does she lose her status as a functioning priest? Is her husband supposed to take away her privilege of offering personally to the Lord? Why no! He has no right to do so. If he considers that he represents his wife when he gives, what about the emblems? Is he expected to eat the bread for her, and take a second drink from the cup for her? Let us be honest and sensible. When a hymn is given, does he sing for her? I think by now you see my point.

In our home we have the Lord's portion set aside. My wife and I draw from it according to our own personal exercise. If she is burdened to help another unfortunate person, she has the liberty to help that person from the Lord's money. At the Supper, what she gives to the Lord is her own personal exercise, and what I give is my own personal exercise.

We are to "shew the Lord's death till He come." By this we see that the Lord's Supper will continue "till He come." God will always have His testimony on earth during this age. Isn't it amazing, that from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, throughout this world of hundreds of various cultures, you will find humble saints gathered on the Lord's day in a circle, with their Lord in the midst, as they eat the bread and drink of the cup, proclaiming with reverence and great joy, His atoning death for them. Thank God our Saviour instituted this Supper to warm our hearts to Himself, and to strengthen us along the way to our heavenly home above. On the other side, no Supper will be needed -- for we shall see Him, face to face!

(concluded)

Troubles drive us to the Bible; the Bible leads us to Christ; Christ leads us to His Father, and there we find peace, comfort and contentment.

The Hands of our Lord Jesus Christ

**Presented in the Three Shepherd Psalms,
Psalm 22-24**

S. J. Saword

The Past: "Pierced Hands"---the Good Shepherd Crucified, Psalm 22:16

In the first portion we behold His love displayed in bearing the curse for us. It afforded amusement and delight to that brutal mob to witness the excruciating agonies of the only-begotten and dearly beloved Son of God. They rejoiced' in driving the cruel spikes into those innocent hands which had so untiringly labored for the blessing of His creatures, men. With equal earnestness and joy his hands had toiled for the comfort of poor miserable beggars, and for the rich and respected; He was impartial as to persons in the dispensing of His wondrous Grace. Those hands, which were stretched out in tireless energy in ministering to the needy **by day, and** which were stretched out towards His Father in intercession **by night**; those same hands which could in power raise the dead, feed the five thousand, and drive out all that defiled the House of His Father, were there at Calvary nailed in weakness and shame

to a Roman gibbet. What a contrast between His hands and those of the malefactors on either side! His hands bore a record of purity, love and gentleness; they had been tenderly laid on the heads of little children in blessing, and always brought peace and joy wherever and in whatever they were employed. Though possessing nothing in this world's riches, yet He was always dispensing good things to the needy around Him. But with the two malefactors we behold hands of violence, avarice and passion; stained with crimes against their fellowmen; transgressions against the laws of their country, and sin against the holy throne of God above; always *ready* for the works of darkness and causing misery and loss to others.

Throughout His public ministry on earth the hands of the Lord Jesus were characterized by acts of self-denial and mercy, but instead of receiving the grateful recognition of a benefitted humanity the voice of the people denounced Him as a rebel and a menace to the peace of the community. However, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound," so that in His death, when He gave "Himself" for us, we behold in His hands the overflowing manifestation of His love. The faithful hands of the ever-devoted Servant of Jehovah, by means of those unutterable sufferings, accomplished the crowning work of all His ministry of love. He paid the infinite price of our redemption; established Peace by the Blood of His Cross and made effective the New Covenant by which a holy God could come down in justifying grace to the sinner, and poor fallen, enslaved sinners could be lifted up into the very presence of God.

The Present: "Unseen Hands," the Great Shepherd caring for the sheep, Psalm 23

In Psalm 23, we have the sweet and comforting meditation upon the Lord Jesus Christ as the **Great Shepherd**. Not once in this Psalm are His hands mentioned, and yet every verse eloquently declares the service of love performed by those unseen hands in meeting every need, emergency and demand of His feeble flock in this desert scene. The piercing of that Blessed One on the cross, instead of silencing forever His loving ministry for mortal man, only caused that glorious ministry to burst forth into a mighty, unfathomable river of Grace that for nineteen hundred years has been watering every corner of this barren world:

"Grace is flowing as a river,
Millions there have been supplied,
Still it flows as fresh as ever
From the Saviour's wounded side."

We do not see now the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ with natural eyes as they were visible when nailed to the Cross, and when shown afterwards to the disciples, but every moment of the day and every step of the journey we see the clearest evidences of those hands employed in our

behalf in bringing down innumerable blessings from the never-failing resources of the Father's home, to bestow them upon us unworthy ones—the sheep so precious to His heart.

The Future: “Clean Hands,”—The Chief Shepherd, coming again, Psalm 24.

Psalm 24 contains that marvelous prophecy concerning the Christ of God in His title to the highest exaltation and glory, and no doubt includes a reference to that future day when He will display His power and majesty before the eyes of men. How precious the assurance that He is coming again for us, and then those wonderful hands, which have upheld and preserved us amidst all the trials of the wilderness, will then once more demonstrate their glorious power in catching us up in a moment, whether our bodies have dissolved to ashes or whether we are still living in this scene; those hands will transform us into the perfect likeness of Himself, and we shall be robed with righteousness and glory; the pearly gates will be opened wide to receive that worthy One with “clean hands,” and we will enter with Him in all the acceptability of His own peerless person.

This Psalm also reminds us of that coming day when the Sceptre of world sovereignty and government will be in His hands, when for the first time in the world's sad history settled peace and righteousness shall reign upon the earth, and God will be fully glorified in His creature man. Thus we behold the matchless worth of His blessed hands in connection with His HUMILIATION in the past; His MINISTRATION in the present, and His EXALTATION in the future. With such a contemplation before our hearts, how can we ever doubt His loving interest and care for His people? Surely we can leave with perfect tranquility of mind all our cares, difficulties and needs in His hands!

We cannot close this devotional study without reference to that solemn passage in Zech. 13:6: “What are these wounds in Thine hands?” Then He shall answer, “Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends.” After such a touching meditation, may our hearts be so softened that we will be led to examine, prayerfully and humbly, our lives in their private, family and public aspects, with a confession and forsaking of all that which would grieve His heart and with which we are daily wounding Him. Also with such thoughts continually before us, it will be a preventive measure against our saying or doing anything that would be equivalent to an injury to Himself.

Announcement

Mr. Robert Surgenor's tracts, booklets and books that he has written are now available for anyone on a website that his son has developed. Go to <http://www.thegospelmessenger.com/> to view them all and order them for your use.

The Light Thereof
Rev. 21:23

I pause outside Heaven's pearl gate
And seek a glimpse therein
And as I linger here and wait
It fades— Earth's ceaseless din.

If like the 'postle, who of old
Was made to see the sight—
His eyes beheld the street of gold
And saw the Lamb— the Light;

May I but gain a fleeting view
As swings that gate again
To open for some saint anew
The path to Heaven's plane.

The glory of that blessed abode
Illumes the way I plod,
And lifts my heart, along the road
That leads my soul to God.

Celestial chords spill on my ears
And make my soul to soar.
They draw again my lonely tears.
I long for Heaven's shore.

My moments here are bittersweet—
I grieve to see one go.
But no— I would not stay their feet
Who're called to Heaven's glow.

They've left the toiling of the way.
They've gained their rest above.
They're basking in eternal day,
In oceans of His love.

O! Let me linger here a while
And gain a glimpse therein
And wean my heart from Earth's sly smile
To fellowship with Him.

My time spent here is more, and good;
Ah; so it is of late—
I'd linger all the hours I could
Just outside Heaven's gate.