

To "... strengthen the things which remain..." Revelation 3:2

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The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible

F. B. Hole ("Library of F. B. Hole")

Of all those great items of scriptural truth which are fundamental in their character, the one which forms our present theme stands first, for the simple reason that whatever may have been the excellence and authority of those revelations of God and of His will originally delivered orally by our Lord and His apostles, except we have, now that they are gone, those revelations conveyed to us in writings, divinely inspired and therefore of full authority, we have nothing worthy of being called THE FAITH today. At best we should have had but an ill-assorted mass of recollections and traditions, handed on from generation to generation. Until therefore the inspiration and authority of the Bible are fully and firmly settled in our souls, it is hardly worth proceeding to establish from its pages those further truths which at first sight may appear to be of a still more fundamental character.

Let us open the Bible, then, with the simple thought of ascertaining what it has to say about itself, and what are its claims.

In the Old Testament three things strike us. First, that in the opening chapters we are told of things completely outside the range of the observation of any human writer, things indeed clean outside any knowledge that could be possessed apart from a divine revelation, since happenings before man's creation are recounted; and further, that these things are stated not in terms befitting human speculation

but with the quiet ring and assurance of absolute knowledge, and therefore of truth.

Secondly, in all the historical books we find features utterly unknown in all human histories. We may specify such a feature as the complete absence of all hero worship. Men, indeed, there are, approved of God, but even so their failings are recounted, just as any commendable feature in the worst of men is mentioned; and all with a lofty detachment from human passions and prejudices, with an impartial and serene judgment which is found only in God Himself. Or, again, we notice that matters, that we never should have even mentioned, are dwelt upon at considerable length — such as the passages Judges 17, 18:14-26, and 1 Samuel 1:4 to 2:11 — while things we should have thought worthy of much notice are ignored; for instance, the great earthquake in the reign of Uzziah is never mentioned historically, and we should have no knowledge that the great catastrophe happened were it not for two passing allusions in Amos and Zechariah. The historical books, in short, are only "history" in so far as its recital serves the purpose of illuminating the purposes or the ways of God.

Thirdly, in the prophets we cannot but feel the directness of their appeal. No hesitation, no apologies; but the most direct and emphatic "Thus saith the Lord" repeated again and again. The Word of God came through their lips and pens, and its powerful appeal to heart

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and conscience is perceptible today in the hostility their words still awaken in sinful men, as well as in the way of subduing men's hearts with a view to their ultimate blessing.

When we reach the New Testament, we find plain endorsements of the inspiration and authority of the Old, first from the lips of our Lord Himself (Matthew 4:4, 4:7, 10; Matthew 5:17; Mark 12:24; Mark 14:21; Luke 21:1; Luke 16:31; Luke 24:25, Luke 24:27, Luke 24:44-46; John 5:46-47; John 10:35), and then from the Evangelists in their frequent references to the fulfillment of Old Testament scripture in the life and death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. "That it might be fulfilled," "That the scripture might be fulfilled," are words that we read over and over again. In the epistles, too, we have inspiration clearly claimed for the Old Testament writers in such passages as 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 1 Peter 1:10-12, and 2 Peter 1:19-21.

What about the New Testament? is the question which may now be asked. In its pages the Old is clearly endorsed and treated as inspired of God, but does it claim or assume inspiration equally for itself? The answer is — Yes.

The New, be it remembered, has come to us from the pens of some of the apostles of our Lord and Saviour, and their co-labourers. In 1 Corinthians 2:13 we have the Apostle Paul claiming inspiration for verbal utterances of his own and of the other apostles when conveying the truths of Divine revelation. In 1 Corinthians 14:37 he asserts that his writings are "the commandments of the Lord." In 2 Peter 3:15-16 we have the Apostle Peter corroborating the epistles of Paul and putting them on a par with "the other scriptures."

Further, in the introductory verses to his Gospel, we have Luke claiming a "perfect understanding of all things from the very first," and also that he wrote "in order" or "with method," so that in result Theophilus might "know the certainty" of the things he had previously received. We have the Apostle John in his first epistle declaring that he wrote it so that believers might "know" that they had eternal life (1 John 5:13). Both these statements assume for the writings in question a certainty and authority which only inspiration can ac-

count for. In the Revelation we have the Apostle John receiving the revelation, bearing record of it, and in result producing "the words of this prophecy" (Revelation 1:1-3), and finally pronouncing a solemn curse on any who should dare to tamper with those "words" as originally given (Revelation 22:18-19). Here, again, inspiration — verbal inspiration — is assumed.

These scriptures are quite sufficient to show that the New Testament writers while asserting the inspiration of the Old assume it in equal measure for themselves; and that therefore while the Holy Scriptures, which Timothy knew from his childhood's days — according to 2 Timothy 3:15 — were the Old Testament writings, the "all scripture" of the next verse covers all those writings which we know as the Bible. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God," or "is God-breathed." A remarkable expression that! Just as in creation the finely wrought vessel of clay — for "the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground" — became a living entity only after God's in-breathing — for He "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul" — so what would otherwise have been but a collection of literary fragments has by the fact of God in-breathing every part become one organic whole; living and powerful indeed, since it is the inspired Word of God.

1 Corinthians 2

1 Corinthians 2 is perhaps the most striking chapter bearing upon this subject, for here we are permitted to see the process that God has been pleased to ordain for the communication of His thoughts to His people. Here are three distinct steps and a distinct action of the Holy Spirit of God in connection with each.

The first step is that of REVELATION. The things prepared of God for those that love Him, things unseen, unheard, and unimagined by man, have been made known by the Spirit of God, who is thoroughly competent for such work, as the end of verse 10 shows. Verse 11 goes further, and declares that the Spirit of God is the only possible source of such revelations.

Now these Spirit-given revelations reached, not the world, not even all saints, but

the apostles and prophets (see Ephesians 3:5), who are the "us" of verse 10; and having received them they proceeded to convey them to others. Hence the "we" of verse 13 indicates the " us " of verse 10.

The second step, then, is that of INSPIRATION. God took care that the apostles and prophets should convey these revelations to others under supervision of a direct and divine kind. They were not left, so verse 13 teaches, to exercise their own wisdom as to the best way of stating the truth, but were guided by the Holy Spirit in the exact words they used.

Thirdly comes the step of APPROPRIATION. The truth having been revealed to men chosen of God, and by them communicated in inspired words, it must now be received or appropriated if it is to have an enlightening and controlling effect upon men. Of this verse 14 speaks. No natural man, i.e., man in his natural or unconverted condition, can possibly receive these things. He totally lacks the faculty that would enable him to receive them. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. Believers have "the mind of Christ," and have received the Spirit of God that they may "know the things that are freely given to us of God."

When we speak then of Revelation, we think of that work of the Spirit of God by which knowledge and thoughts which are purely divine are conveyed to the minds and hearts of men chosen of God.

When we speak of Inspiration we refer to that second work of the Spirit of God by which those men were enabled to set forth the revealed truth in words divinely chosen and therefore of divine fullness and precision, whether they spoke or whether they wrote them.

Revelation is concerned with the transference of truth from the mind of God to the minds of apostles and prophets, so that the conception and understanding of it might be theirs.

Inspiration is concerned with the transference of the same truth from the minds of the apostles and prophets to all the saints, and for this not merely thoughts but words were needed. But if human words are to be the proper expression of divine truth they must be chosen and used with perfect fitness and accuracy, and

this was secured by the action of the Holy Ghost. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21).

The word translated "moved" in that passage means "carried" or "borne along." These holy men of Old Testament times spake, as borne along by the Holy Spirit.

Take Jeremiah, for instance. It may be quite true that a certain tone and style marks his writings so that any man of literary discernment and familiar with the contents of the Bible may usually recognize them wherever quoted; still, the Spirit of God was the power that bore his mind along the flowing current of God's will, and so controlled his writing that both thoughts and words were God's.

Sometimes, indeed, this action of the Holy Spirit took so powerful a form as to overleap necessary limitations that existed in the mind of the prophet in question, and caused him to write things the real and full meaning of which he knew not: and so it came to pass that some, if not all, the writers of Old Testament scripture had to enquire and search diligently concerning the meaning of that which they themselves had written. The Spirit of Christ in them had been signifying in their writings matters concerning the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. In answer to their search it was further revealed to them that they were writing for the benefit of saints in the future — the saints of the present dispensation. This being so, the full import of their inspired writings necessarily remained vague and indistinct to their own minds. There was full inspiration, but no full revelation save to future generations. 1 Peter 1:10-12 tells us about this, and proves how powerful and real a thing inspiration is.

With this may be contrasted the kind of inspiration alluded to by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14. In verse 19 he tells us that when giving inspired communications in the assemblies of the saints his object was to give words with his understanding, even if only five in number. He desired to speak of things which he intelligently apprehended in such a way that they were thoroughly intelligible to his listeners.

The kind of inspiration spoken of in 1 Peter 1:10-12 largely characterized the Old Testament writers, and inasmuch as the proph-

ets, who in these cases were the vehicles of the messages, were uninstructed as to the full purport of their words, it may be described, for want of a better term, as unintelligent inspiration.

The kind of inspiration mentioned in 1 Corinthians 2 is that which almost entirely characterizes the New Testament writings, and may by contrast be termed intelligent inspiration. The possible exception to the rule, which leads us to insert the word "almost" in the above statement, and italicize it, is the case of some parts of the Revelation. It is quite likely that some of the visions and statements in that remarkable unveiling of the future were obscure to John the seer as they are to us, and that they will only stand out clear in their full and distinct meaning to saints of the coming tribulation period. The famous number 666 (Revelation 13:18) is the most pronounced example of what we mean.

The above distinction may be helpful to those who would study the question a little more closely. It must never be overlooked, however, that whether unintelligent or intelligent, the fact and degree of inspiration is in both cases exactly the same.

(continued)

The Carpenter's Son... the Carpenter

Matt. 13:55, Mk. 6:3 (Mt. 16:18, Eph. 2:10)

The only references to the word "carpenter" in the New Testament are found with relation to the Lord Jesus. It was an expression of His identification among the people of Nazareth, where He had worked with His earthly father, Joseph, in the productive labors in which he was occupied. We know little or nothing about the kind of work that entailed, whether very basic or more refined, so we will just look at the meaning of the word and learn something from it.

We should recognize that nothing that God does is by chance or without purpose. It is very interesting, that Christ was identified distinctly as the "carpenter's son", or "the carpenter" by the people. Such an identity goes beyond the mere human recognition of His

occupation, as we know that expressions of Scripture are all determined and known by God to accomplish a purpose.

Why was it God's purpose for our blessed Lord to be a Carpenter? He spoke of Himself as the Good Shepherd in John 10, and certainly He is. He referred to the disciples as "fishers of men" and that was what they became. But surely the fact of His being called a carpenter must have more than a mundane purpose of identification by the people.

We would suggest a purpose and teaching that is involved in His being called the Carpenter:

Meaning of "Carpenter"

The word "carpenter" (G5045) means "artificer, craftsman," and is a word that seems to be derived from a word used for producing, bringing forth, birth, seed sprouting... producing something. It is the word used in Grk. Trans. Of 2 Samuel 5:11, 2 Kings 12:11, (carpenters who did the work in the temple of Solomon), and Isaiah 40:20 ("skillful workman"). It is derived from "architekton" or chief constructor, architect. So that it is suggestive of the skill, work, and purpose of our blessed Lord. Notice some simple thoughts related to a carpenter.

1. A Carpenter must know the character of His Materials that he works with.

Wood is living material. . .all woods are different, with different qualities and characteristics. Different woods have different grain, hardness, durability, bend-ability, and colors. Some woods are hard, more rigid, but more durable. To work with these takes time, care, patience to work with, mold and shape to purpose. Yet woods such as these last and resist elements.

Some woods are more soft and flexible, so they can be shaped more easily, carved, and formed. They may not be so durable, or hard, but they have a purpose and unique attractiveness. Some woods have a natural beauty more than others, but all can be stained and made beautiful when finished.

The material that Christ has selected to work with, producing "masterpieces" (Ephesians 2:10) is not all the same. Christians are not all of the same nature, not with the same personalities or dispositions. Some are more

definite, determined, settled in their minds, and while they may take longer to develop, they may also be more lasting, and more resistant to outside influences. Others may be more responsive, quicker to show results, may have a warmer personality and are more pliable. They also have a usefulness and an attractiveness. A carpenter suits the material to the product that he wishes to create, and his use of tools and stains may differ, depending on the kind of wood that he is working.

It is through the infinite wisdom of our Lord that believers come from many different backgrounds with different characteristics. We are thankful that not all are the same, for each one contributes something to the purpose that He has in the building. Sometimes we find such differences somewhat difficult, and one believer might feel frustrated because he or she is not like another, or because another believer is not like him. The Lord knows each one, and He is working in the life of each child of God to produce something in them that reflects His wisdom and skill. The Lord told Ananias, when sent to Saul in Acts 9, that he was a chosen vessel, to bear His name before kings and rulers for the Lord's sake (v. 15). He surely proved that the Lord selected the proper material to use for this important function!

It is our responsibility to seek to yield to His will and recognize that "all things work together for good," (Romans 8:28), perhaps not good as we see it, but certainly for the fulfillment of His purpose in choosing us and bringing each one who is His into this relationship with Himself. Events, conditions, circumstances, difficulties and other influences all have an effect to bring about the results that are for His glory and honor. It is for our good that we seek to recognize His hand working in these ways.

2. A Carpenter has a Plan and Purpose in Mind when selecting materials

He intends to produce something that is according to His purpose, and useful. The wise carpenter selects his materials, and works them to accomplish the purpose he has in mind. When visiting an Amishman who built special buggies for the movie and tourist trade, we saw that he selected certain woods for certain purposes.

Some were placed in a steamer so that they could be bent to form the wheels, while others were used for other parts. In the same way, the Lord, as the Carpenter, has a divine purpose in view, and He can control and use any means He desires to accomplish it. Peter speaks of the trials of life that the believers experience, and indicates that the sore trials that one experiences may cause present heaviness and sorrow, yet the end result is that the "trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ," (1 Peter 1:6-7).

An artistic craftsman in wood can often see the product that he wishes for produce in the raw wood, and selects it for this reason. So the Lord knows the purpose that He has for each believer, and guides events in his life to produce that which is honoring to Him.

3. A Carpenter has Ability to shape the wood, conform it to His purpose

He may use different tools, different methods, pressures, or different amounts of time. The ability is in his hands, along with a knowledge of how to use his tools. Not every wood, nor every purpose would call for the same methods. To produce what He desires, he fits different pieces together, producing compatibility of one with the other. We can rest assured that in the life of every Christian, the master "Carpenter" is doing a work that may be different in their life than it is in ours, but He has the ability to accomplish His own purpose in the way that is suited to the individual.

4. A Carpenter eventually brings his work to its Completion. .Perfect

What he makes reflects on Himself and His ability. It is an honor to Him. It will be useful, according to the purpose for which he has made it. Paul uses the illustration of vessels in a great house (2 Timothy 2:20-21), showing that there are a variety of vessels, and each one is suited for the purpose intended. The stress in that passage is on the importance of maintaining purity and being separate from all that would hinder one's usefulness for God. One day, believers will be displayed to the glory and

honor of the Lord when His work is finished. The church is a masterpiece of His creation. Eternally, she will enjoy His presence and reflect His glory, and He will receive the honor and praise. What is lacking now, or what is defective in our development spiritually, will be brought to completion so that all will be eventually displayed to emphasize what **HE** has done. It is for our blessing to seek to appreciate all that the divine Carpenter is seeking to do in our lives and to allow Him to have His way unreservedly.

The closer a believer walks with God, the more he will realize the incurable corruption of his Adamic nature.
H.A.Ironside

Deacons and Service

Joel Portman

The service of believers is a very important subject in the Scriptures. It is a result of redemption that the Lord Jesus accomplished on the cross by which we are claimed for Him and made fit to serve Him. It's also our responsibility toward Him who is our Master and who claims our service as the proper response of devoted hearts that have received so much. It is our privilege to do so, being honored by His entrusting us with His work to occupy us until He comes again.

Meaning of "Deacon"

Deacon is a word that was not translated from the origin word "diakonos" (Strong #1249) in Greek. The origin of the word seems to be uncertain, but it may be derived from "in the dust laboring, or running through dust." ("Word Study Dictionary", S. Zodhiates). It is usually translated "minister" or "servant." It expresses the servant in his capacity to accomplish a work, to meet the requirements of one whom he is serving and a work that he is doing. It looks at the servant in relation to his work and his fitness for that work, rather than conveying any idea of compulsion, or even voluntarism or bondage as "doulos" would suggest.

An exact rendering signifies a "runner, servant, messenger, or assistant." It indicates one who is competent, capable, and trustworthy, and who can faithfully carry out the interests of his superior in a proper manner. Often it has the idea of responsible representation, or something more than menial service.

Occurrences in the New Testament

Usage in the Gospels. The word is usually translated "servants". It was spoken by the Lord concerning the disciples (Matthew 20:26, John 12:26), about common servants in a household (John 2:5,9), and regarding servants of the King (Matthew 22:13).

Usage in Acts. It is generally assumed to apply to the "seven" in Acts 6, but it is never used as a title of these men, they are only called "the seven" (Acts 21:8). However, in Acts 6:2, the expression, "serve tables" is the verb form of the word, and their work is generally connected with deacon work in this instance. We find it in Acts 19:22 in a similar usage.

Usage in the Epistles. It is the word used for governing officials who function to administer the laws of the country (Romans 13:4), as servants ultimately of God (v. 6), as they carry out that responsibility. They are seen in their capacity to accomplish that work that God has determined is necessary for the maintenance of order society and for the execution of judgment on evil doers.

Christ is "diakonos" in relation to His work to carry out God's will (Romans 15:8). He is spoken of as a "minister of the circumcision" but never as a slave (doulos) to men. But He did serve as a slave (doulos) to God to accomplish a work for the benefit of His people and to fulfill God's purposes toward them.

Apostles and other servants who were actively engaged in service for the Lord and His people were called deacons, whether they served in teaching, ministering to others, or in the gospel. This includes Phoebe in Romans 16:1, who is called a "deaconess" of the assembly in Cenchrea, and Paul and those with him (1 Corinthians 3:5, Ephesians 3:7, 1 Timothy 4:6 re. Timothy.) The qualifications for such

men are found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. In this passage, the adjectives that are applied to "deacons" are in the masculine plural, indicating that these were men who functioned publicly in the local assembly. In v. 11, it is impossible to determine clearly that he is referring to women deacons; it seems better to allow the verse to describe the wives of deacons.

Aspects to Notice

1. In the Gospels, this word is usually used as it applies primarily to "spiritual truths." I.e., the pictures presented illustrate to us what should be true of everyone seeking to serve the Lord in any capacity. We do not take their usages as indicating physical aspects of work as would be pictured in the parables presented, or in its application to the disciples (Matthew 23:11).

2. In Acts, the noun is not found, but the verb is (#1247) in Acts 6:2. However, more than simple manual labor was involved in this matter. Consider the serious implications of the work for which the apostles sought the Seven. It was a wise response by the apostles to a very serious problem that had arisen that called for great wisdom and care, to make sure that it would not result in lasting consequences that would produce division among the saints at this early stage. The work involved their responsible representation of the entire company in the work of distributing funds needed for the care of the widows who were destitute, and it would have great personal, emotional and spiritual implications.

Notice in this case the extremely high qualifications that were required in those who were called to this work. They were excellent, spiritual, qualified men who could be entrusted with this serious work. They had to possess:

1. A Good Testimony (honest report), the same as in 1 Timothy 3:8 regarding deacons. They could not have anything about their lives that would give any ground for a charge to be laid against them, or which would bring any reproach upon the work in which they were engaged. It is a word related to "witness" or capability to be a martyr for the truth, giving faithful testimony without compromise. It is the same 16:2 regarding Timothy, and in Acts 22:12 regarding Ananias from all the Jews.

2. Full of the Holy Spirit or subject to and

being controlled by the Holy Spirit. These were not carnal men, not fleshly men, but men whose lives displayed spiritual power. This characteristic was not displayed by spiritual gift then nor now; it is an entirely different thing altogether. It is not by the ability to perform miraculous works. It is by the evidence of a life that exhibits the spiritual qualities that show that one is subject to spiritual control, in one who displays the fruit that is the evidence of it.

3. Marked by Wisdom They possessed excellence in attitude and action. This included knowledge and godliness, a striving after the highest by the best means. It expresses a proper outlook on life that applies spiritual and eternal principles to decisions, priorities, ambitions and expectations. It is the characteristic of taking account of knowledge and observations, and resolving conflicts and difficulties in a spiritual context with the proper application of truth to every aspect.

Notice the further expression of their work, which went beyond giving physical assistance in a local assembly, or more than doing mundane tasks such as cleaning the hall or arranging the chairs. It was a work that involved representing the entire assembly, taking responsibility in serious, vital matters, which was an expression of work that required spiritual qualities to fulfill.

If this is not true, then we would have to require that any one who does anything to serve in an assembly must possess the same spiritual qualities that are called for in the New Testament regarding deacons. Either that, or we would need to lower the standard to enable those who are not so qualified so that they can be involved in such service.

Usage in the Epistles. The verb form (#1247) is used in several ways that would involve physical ministry as well as spiritual. Notice the following references:

Romans 15:25, regarding Paul going to Jerusalem to "minister" to the saints (materially). But that ministry involved great responsibility, since he was conveying the gift of the saints in Asia to those needy ones in Judea. This is also seen in 2 Corinthians 8:19, involving the collecting of the gift for the assistance

of the Jewish saints.

2 Timothy 1:18. Onesiphorus' service to Paul in prison in Rome is called "deaconing."

Philemon 18 when referring to Onesimus, who might have served Paul when in prison.

The noun form (#1249), is used

2 Corinthians 11:15 when describing Satan's servants carrying out his bidding.

Romans 13, regarding government officials functioning in their service.

Romans 15:8, in application to Christ's service toward the nation of Israel

It is also used with regard to the apostles and those who labored with them to serve the Lord in a spiritual capacity.

Conclusion

It seems clear that the primary emphasis in the epistles is on those who fulfill a spiritual work that represents Christ or the saints such as in handling material things belonging to the Lord, the preaching of the gospel to sinners or in the teaching of the Word to the saints. This is entirely true in passages that speak of a deacon in his service toward a local assembly. There never seems to be any aspect of this truth that involves what we might normally think of as deacon, or serving work, in the more menial aspects of it.

However, one cannot entirely rule out the other aspects that include physical and material service to the saints. It does seem that in relation to assembly function, this is not the primary teaching, and if it is in any case, it is in a capacity that involves responsibility and representation of the assembly as a whole, such as handling assembly finances or serving in a capacity that demands responsibility to represent the entire assembly.

(Continued)

AUTUMN GLORY...

Jim Beattie

With the leaves beginning to change colour, trees are announcing that the summer theatre is closing its doors in preparation for the autumn drama. A new season is about to begin.

In its wake are other changes. School is already in full swing. We will be storing sum-

mer furniture, busy with harvest, celebrating Thanksgiving and—soon enough—making preparation for the Christmas holidays.

What impresses me so much about autumn is the awesome beauty of the season. This is underscored in a special way when I travel through northern Ontario. I can still recall my first sight of autumn leaves at their peak in the near north. I was in my mid-teens and I was overwhelmed with the sight as I stood at a high point overlooking a deep valley filled with a full spectrum of fall colours.

I see a lesson in this. God has left the blaze of glory for the end of life. I think of people I have known who are now gone. As they faced the end of their days they became sweeter, more mellow, a greater joy to be with.

I have also seen sad exceptions to this. Life has its trials and some people allow themselves to become bitter. They build up an account of hostility accumulated from perceived wrongs, misunderstandings, slights, and a multitude of other hurts.

There are two ways to leave this world. In the Bible, Job notes both. He observes: "One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet. And another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure" (Job 21:23, 25).

The Psalmist speaks of those who have placed their trust in God and shows the wonderful result of this. He states: "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing" (Psalm 92:12 -14).

How we end our days depends on our attitude. We can go out with glory or with gloom. The fall season is a first-class reminder of what will mark the closing seasons of our life.

"Thanksgiving is inseparable from true prayer; it is almost essentially connected with it. One who always prays is ever giving praise, whether in ease or pain, both for prosperity and for the greatest adversity. He blesses God for all things, looks on them as coming from Him, and receives them for His sake- not choosing nor refusing, liking or disliking, anything, but only as it is agreeable or disagreeable to His perfect will."
—John Wesley

Gideon

Paul Plubell

I would like that you read with me from the Book of Judges, chapter 6, verse 11, through to chapter 7, verse 7, and then from verse 16 of that chapter to verse 21. May God bless to us the reading of His Holy Word.

One cannot but be amazed at the repeated apostasy of Israel. The Book of Judges alone records that seven times the children of Israel went into apostasy, and that seven times over the Lord raised up a man to deliver them from the servitude of their enemies, and to lead them back into the blessing of Almighty God.

When we come to chapter 6, we see the people in bondage to the Midianites, and if we had read farther back, we would have noticed the message of the Lord by the prophet to the people, "Ye have not obeyed My voice." That which brought Israel into bondage was disobedience to God. When disobedience took place, the Midianite moved in. "Midian" means strife. What a sad condition must have existed in the land with hunger, enmity, strife, and disobedience among God's beloved people.

How wonderful of the Lord to remind us that, regardless of how grave the situation, God had a man. I am prepared to say that God will always have a man. Remember this, God is always prepared to use a man, or a group of men, to lead his people back into fellowship with Himself. Such a man was Gideon. I would like to inspire in the hearts of all with a desire to follow his example, to be a man of God in the face of outstanding difficulties.

I would like you to notice this man. The Bible says that when the Lord found him, he was threshing wheat. Mr. Newbury points out that he was threshing wheat "in" the winepress. In the midst of starvation and bondage I see one man, Gideon, down in the winepress threshing wheat. He was going to see that his people were fed. Regardless of what else would come or go, the people that belonged to Gideon were going to feed upon wheat. Notice the place where Gideon was, in the winepress, the place where the blood of the grape was trampled out, the place typifies Calvary. If you expect to feed the people of God, O, young man, listen! If you aspire to feed God's people

you will have to stay by the winepress. There is always one means through which God provides for His people; it is through the man that dwells near the cross of Calvary.

Repeatedly in the Word of God, the simile is used that we, His people, are the sheep of His pasture. Sheep in the Scriptural sense do not need to be sheared, they need to be fed. It is amazing that in the Bible sheep shearing is only mentioned three times, and each time in connection with evil. How anxious God is to leave on record that He would have His people fed.

The Lord found Gideon in the place of the cross preparing the finest of the wheat in order to feed the people. Notice how He addresses him, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." God reckons things in a different light to what we do, a man need not be in the forefront of the battle to be considered courageous. He may, like Gideon, under trying circumstances be quietly preparing food for the people of God. God recognizes valour in the man that maintains something of communion with Himself.

Immediately the Lord addressed Gideon, he identified himself with the sad condition of the nation. This is one thing that is always found in a God-sent leader. He does not stand aside and accuse others; like Nehemiah he confesses, "I and my people have sinned." Gideon began to speak to the Lord about the state of declension, but the Lord gave him one command, "I have sent thee, go in this thy might." With this word and commendation from the Lord that timid man became the man of valour, and he left the winepress to lead the people of God to victory. God is still looking for men like that; men who will dwell with Christ near the cross; men who will bask in His love and feed His people, and go forth to triumph in the power of the Lord.

Did you ever think of how many answered Gideon's call for volunteers? Thirty thousand. I would to God that it were as easy today to get volunteers for the work of Christ. Thirty thousand men left everything and, with a man little known, went to win the battle for the Lord under his leadership.

The Lord said, "The people are too many. . . lest Israel should vaunt themselves

against Me saying, mine own hand hath saved me." Moreover, the Lord told Gideon that He was going to test them. God never raises up a man without first of all testing that man. The test was, "Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return." Twenty-two thousand faint-hearted men immediately turned their backs upon the Lord's cause. This was the first test, the test of faint-heartedness. No one can win a victory for God with a faint heart. If you desire to serve God and Christ, you will have to lose all thoughts of being faint-hearted, because you will find out that it takes stamina and ability to carry on in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ. Oh! If you are convinced of your stand for the Lord and for His Word, do not be afraid. Do not be like these people who, when the test was given, turned their backs and went away faint-hearted.

There were ten thousand left, but the Lord said that these were too many, so He devised another test. They were to be taken to the water, and the man that stooped to drink, lapping the water like a dog, was to be set on one side, and whoever bowed to drink was to be set on the other side. Three hundred men drank, lapping the water to their mouths by their hands as they went along, but the rest bowed, taking time to quench their thirst.

If the first test was faintheartedness, the second was half-heartedness. For a moment the three hundred men paused, snatching the water to their mouths, for the King's business required haste. Young brother, what we need is men that have all their hearts in the things of God; not faint-hearted, or half-hearted, but willing-hearted men.

These three hundred men went forth to battle. In one hand each held a pitcher, an earthen pitcher with a light in it, and in the other each held a trumpet. That night, in three companies, they broke the pitchers, and held their lamps in their hands.

Paul says, "God Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts." Do you not see the lesson? That vessel is you possessed with the light of testimony, and that trumpet is your confession of Christ as Lord. They blew the trumpets, and also broke the pitchers. Paul says, "God commanded the light to shine out," and then adds,

"We have this treasure in earthen vessels." It is impossible to blow the trumpet and not let the light shine through a broken pitcher. Paul says, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels", and then adds, "We are oppressed and afflicted on every side," and then he gives the account of what had happened to him in the service of the gospel. Paul, as a vessel was broken. The more experiences he had of this type, the more the light shone forth. If there is anything that we turn away from, it is not the blowing of the trumpet, but the breaking of the vessel. You know, brethren, self is the great enemy of our testimony. How tenaciously we hold to that which keeps the light from shining. Thank God, when the vessel is broken the light does go forth.

Our victory as the people of God may be unusual; unusual in this, God may have to put His hand on us and crush us; He may have to break the earthen vessel.

I sat beside a young woman who had been a stalwart Christian in earlier days; she had loved the Lord and sought to please Him. I had gone to her because the word had come that her husband had died on the battle field of France. I tried to console that young girl. She said to me, "Mr. Plubell, when the word came that my husband was dead, I had only one cry, "Take me home, Lord, take me home." But she added, "I have gotten over that now, and I find that it will take more grace to live for the Lord, and to raise my boy for Him than ever it would to go home to Heaven." You see, God had removed the one in her life who had been preventing the light from shining out.

Oh! May God raise up in our day, men like Gideon who will live near the cross, who will feast upon His Son, who will feed the people of God regardless of what comes or goes, feed them with the finest of the wheat; men who will answer the call, not faint-heartedly, or half-heartedly, but willingly; men who will say, "Let my light shine forth, cost what it may, and help me, Lord, to blow the trumpet." If such be among us, God will give the victory. May He do so until the day break, and the shadows flee away.