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Is There A Biblical Pattern For The Church? Pt. 2

Jack Hayes

New Testament Churches were Guided by Overseers

The responsibility for leadership in New Testament assemblies devolved upon overseers, (often translated 'bishop' in the King James Version). These men are also described as being elders, that is, men of a mature spiritual experience, 1 Timothy 6. They were not elected by the congregation, but appointed by the sovereign choice of the Holy Spirit, Acts 20:28. Certain qualifications had to be met, and these are outlined in 1 Timothy chapter 3, and Titus chapter 1. The responsibilities of overseers were varied, but are summarized in both the teaching of Paul and Peter, "feed (shepherd) the church of God": "feed the flock of God", Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2. The duty of overseers is to attend to every aspect of the spiritual needs of the believers under their care. That is why the metaphor of a shepherd is used to describe them, Ephesians 4:11. (The word is translated 'pastor' in the King James Version but is just the normal Greek word for 'shepherd'. The modern concept of one 'pastor' caring for the flock is not founded on the teaching of scripture). Observe that there were a number of bishops (overseers) in one church, Acts 20:17, 28; Philippians 1:1, and not one bishop over a number of churches as

is current under some forms of church government today.

New Testament Churches were Instructed by a Number of Preachers

In Christendom, a system has developed that we call the clerical system, in which one man has almost the sole responsibility of preaching to a congregation week by week. That practice is not based on the teaching of the Bible. In New Testament times, in each local church, a number of men had responsibility for ministering to God's people. Indeed, every believer had some part to play, for the assembly is likened to a human body with each member playing a vital role. Every believer has been endowed with a spiritual gift that has to be employed for the good of the whole body. To pay one man to bear almost the whole responsibility of helping God's people is a contradiction of the 'body of Christ' aspect of the local church, 1 Corinthians 12:27.

The word 'minister' in the King James Version, e.g. Colossians 1:7, is a translation of the Greek word diakonos. Elsewhere it is rendered 'deacon', just an anglicized form of the Greek word. It simply means a 'servant'. Some of these men preached the Gospel, Colossians 1:23, and others were teachers of God's people, 1 Timothy 6, but there was always a number of them in each local church, Philippians 1:1. In the church at Antioch there were five preachers, Acts 13:1. This number increased, so that later there were 'many', Acts 15:35. There is no hint that these men wore distinctive clothes, as do the clergy today. That practice is a relic of Judaism in which the priesthood was distinct from the people, their very appearance making the distinction obvious. In Christianity, every blood-washed believer forms part of the priesthood, 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:5-6. As far as the teaching and preaching were concerned then, in each assembly a number of appropriately gifted men shared that responsibility. They had no formal college training for the task, but simply used the spiritual gift that God had given them.

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is a monthly publication that is freely available on the Internet and is intended to be a help to believers who appreciate the timeless truths of God's Word and who recognize the unchanging principles of God's will for His people. It is primarily intended to strengthen those who enjoy fellowship in local assemblies of believers who are gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

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New Testament Churches had no Audible Female Participation

A reading of the New Testament will demonstrate that Christian women played a crucial role in the ongoing work of God. Such sisters as Priscilla, Phebe and Eunice are but examples of the noble band of women-folks whose contribution to assembly life was invaluable. However, teaching the Word is vocal participation in the gatherings and is for the men only. That may sound strange in an age of equal opportunities in politics and business, but it is the clear teaching of scripture. The general statement that covers the point is, "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak", 1 Corinthians 14:34. The immediate context shows that the prohibition extends even to asking a question in a public gathering. Elsewhere, it takes in public praying, in that the men (Greek word meaning males) should pray, 1 Timothy 2:8, and it certainly forbids public teaching on the part of the sisters, 1 Timothy 2:12. The difference between the genders should be seen not only in functions, but also in appearance. The first half of 1 Corinthians 11 shows, that in the gatherings, the men, with short hair, should have their heads uncovered, and that the women, with long hair, should have their heads covered. Among other things, these are visible tokens of the man acknowledging Christ's headship, and the woman acknowledging the God appointed headship of the man.

New Testament Churches Celebrated the Lord's Supper Weekly

The Lord's Supper was instituted by the Lord Himself on the eve of His crucifixion. In the loaf and cup He was giving tangible emblems of His body and blood, and His command to His disciples was to perpetuate this ordinance in remembrance of Himself. The practice of the early believers in the book of Acts gives guidance regarding the 'breaking of bread'. A quick glance at the end of chapter two will reveal that the participants were people who had been saved by responding to Peter's preaching. Subsequently, they were baptized, and then, among other things, they continued steadfastly in the breaking of bread, v 42. That

scriptural sequence should not be disturbed. The Lord's Supper should never be seen as a 'means of grace' on the part of an unsaved person, and an unbaptized believer who participates has failed to appreciate the importance of the order of Scripture. The Lord Jesus commanded baptism for His disciples, Matthew 28:19, and there are constant references in the Acts of the Apostles to people being baptized immediately after conversion. They were baptized as believers and not as infants; there is no precedent for infant baptism in the Bible. They were baptized by immersion in water. The Greek word baptizo means 'to dip', and the record of Acts 8:38-39 where both Philip and the Ethiopian went down into the water shows that this was the mode of baptism. The spiritual symbolism of baptism, that is, burial and resurrection, serves to emphasize this point, Romans 6:1-11. So then, the converts of Acts 2, having been saved and baptized, shared the fellowship of the local church of which the Lord's Supper was a part. In Acts 20:7, guidance is given regarding when the breaking of bread should be, "upon the first day of the week". Despite being keen to make progress on his journey v. 16, Paul deliberately waited at Troas to be with the disciples to break bread. He had no thought of celebrating the supper on another day, or even on board ship as he traveled. The words 'oft' and 'often' in 1 Corinthians 11:25-26 imply a not infrequent remembrance of Christ.

New Testament Churches Met Regularly for Collective Prayer

Collective prayer was an important function of the early churches, Acts 2:42, 4:23-24, 12:5, and the prayer meeting should still be a priority for every assembly. On some occasions in the Acts, these were impromptu gatherings in emergency conditions, but it is clear that meetings for prayer were a regular feature of the early churches. The doctrinal part of the Word that regulates the conduct of prayer meetings is 1 Timothy chapter 2. The first two verses show how we should pray, blending supplications, intercessions and thanksgivings. They show for whom we should pray, and why, and really, the command to pray for 'all men' provides wide scope for our public prayers. As has

been observed already, verse 8 indicates who should do the public praying, i.e. the men.

New Testament Churches were Centers from which the Gospel Radiated

It was said of the Thessalonian assembly, "From you sounded out the word of the Lord" (1 Thess. 1:8). This should be a characteristic of every local church. Indeed, its continued existence depends on an energetic successful gospel outreach. This is the only method by which sinners are won to Christ and added to the company of believers bearing collective testimony for Him. A metaphor of the assembly in scripture is that of a golden lampstand, Revelation 1-3. The point of the illustration is that the witness of every local church should be such, that the light of the Gospel penetrates the dense moral and spiritual darkness that pervades our communities. New Testament churches were not just respectable, religious social clubs, but they comprised of people who had a burden to reach their neighbors and friends with the life-changing gospel. Their commitment to that goal was unquestioning.

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, these articles have been framed with the newly saved person in mind, but we all have to take stock of our ecclesiastical position. Ask the question, "does the group I am linked with match the New Testament pattern?" If not, you have a responsibility to respond to the teaching of Scripture and to meet with believers whose principles of gathering correspond to that biblical pattern. Obviously this study has not been exhaustive, but be like the people of Berea, who "searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so", Acts 17:11.

The Assembly that is not active for God must be expected to be frowned on by God; and if God frowns then comes deadness, dissatisfaction and division.

The Gospel

Larry Steers

"The preacher sought to find out acceptable words" (Eccl. 12:10).

Much has been written seeking to give help and guidance to younger brethren who have a burden to preach the gospel. Yet, many of the saints are troubled because there is not the clear presentation of the gospel that characterized assembly testimony in former years. Immediately we hear the objection that we cannot live in the past, we must change with the times and new methods are essential.

However, let us look at present results.

Many assemblies are small and getting smaller. Few are getting saved and added to assembly fellowship. Prayer meetings before the gospel meeting consist of a few burdened souls. Gospel series are shorter, restricting the Holy Spirit to a week or two. These few observations only touch the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

The writer was a former history teacher. One of the key reasons instilled into the minds of students for studying history was, "we learn from the past". When nations fail to grasp the lessons from their history, they travel the road to eventual disaster. Evidence of this is clearly manifested in the historical record.

We do learn from the scriptural record of men and women who traversed the scenes of time in their day. Their lives are on record in the Word of God for our spiritual benefit, blessing, and help. We must look back and consider past blessings and failures carefully .

While it is not my exercise here to give a detailed history of gospel work relative to assemblies gathered in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, for that is readily available, we are exercised to reach the present generation. The exercise is, first, that God will raise up amongst us burdened pioneers who will be commended to take the gospel to new areas. The second burden is that the gospel preached each Lord's Day evening will stir the saints as well as sinners.

Privilege: Presenting Christ to Sinners

There is no happier or more important exercise than to present heaven's costliest gift to those

who are not saved. What a privilege to preach the gospel. "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things" (Rom. 10:15). Believers rejoice when a soul they have been speaking to trusts the Savior.

A deposit of Divine truth has been given to each believer. "That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us" (2 Tim. 1:14).

While we are concerned about the gospel meeting, many soul winners have never stood on a public platform, but all should be stirred to present "the glorious gospel of the blessed God" (1Tim. 1:11) at every opportunity presented to them. It is the responsibility of every believer to speak for their Lord.

However, two words are found in the scriptures which describe the great commission in operation.

a) Evangelizo – a verb form of "evangelion" which means to announce the glad tidings. This word is found 55 times in the scriptures and is the word for "preached" in 1 Cor.15:1.

b) Kerusso – to be a herald, to proclaim. This word is found 61 times . It is the word used of John the Baptist (Luke 3:18), of the Lord (Luke 4:18) and of Paul and the Apostles (1 Cor.1:23).

Evangelizo emphasizes the MATERIAL while kerusso stresses the METHOD of presentation. Preaching is the best method, the sinners mouth is stopped and they must listen without argument or debate.

Perception: The Vision

"Where there is no vision the people perish" (Prov. 29:18).

In the world men and women of greatness have had a vision.

John F. Kennedy, the 35th President of the United States, was a great speaker. One of his memorable quotes was "Ask not what your country can do for you but ask what you can do for your country. Martin Luther stirred many with his "I have a dream" speech.

Do we have a gospel vision or has it been lost? "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him"

(Psa.126:5–6). Note one word in these beautiful verses “doubtless”. We can make multitudes of excuses for lack of a vision, but God promises blessing.

Consider the well known parable of the sower in Mark 4:1 to 20. “Hearken, and behold, there went out a sower to sow” (verse 3). The Lord gave the meaning of the parable. “The sower soweth the seed” (verse 14). The seed fell on different kinds of ground. Some fell by the way side and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up. “Satan cometh immediately and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts (verse 15). A real exercised soul winner weeps when they recognize this satanic work. Sinners that appear troubled and not far from the Kingdom of God turn away and concern disappears. How sad! Many a herald of the cross has wept.

But there were also stony ground hearers. (verse 5) but there was not much earth. They seemed to have received the word with gladness (verse 16). Saints may even sing “Happy day”, but there was no ploughing up relative to sin, no sense of being lost, and no genuine repentance. There was no root (verse 17). Again tears!

Thirdly, some fell among thorns (verse 7). The thorns grew up and choked the seed. The Lord likened the thorns to the cares of this world (verse 19) and the deceitfulness of riches and the lust of other things “which choke the word and it becometh unfruitful”. How often the herald weeps but does not give up when facing discouragement. He is convinced with real conviction that there is nothing wrong with the seed. The herald of the cross continues with the great stewardship God has given him. There will be a reaping in the great gospel harvest.

“Some seed fell on good ground” (verse 8) “and did yield fruit, some thirtyfold, and some sixty, and some a hundred” (verse 20). Rejoicing!

How the evangelist longs for good ground hearers. In times of persecution “they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). Paul reminded the Thessalonians “ From you sounded out the word of the Lord” (1 Thess. 1:8). Do we in 2016 have a vision of men and women repenting and turning to God from their idols to serve

the living and true God.

One of the marks of a healthy assembly is a vibrant gospel testimony. The gospel of the grace of God is the very heart of an assembly. No gospel exercise and the assembly will dry up and wither away.

Brethren, get young believers exercised in the sowing of the good gospel seed. Get them occupied with tract work in the area of the assembly, speaking to sinners about their Savior, and involved in children’s work. When it is all ministry and little gospel exercise even ministry can become dry.

Back to Prov. 29:18. Men and women who accomplished great works for God had a vision. Let me mention a few, some from the past and some from the present.

Hudson Taylor had a vision of reaching souls in China. Along with others the Gospel was proclaimed in that spiritually dark land. The good seed was sown, a work was started which touched thousands of souls. The communist government of China, which made a mighty effort, could not destroy the roots of that work.

Anthony Norris Groves left a dental practice and a comfortable life in England because he had a vision. Even standing at the grave of his wife and daughter could not diminish the vision. Groves arrived in India and commenced a great work in that land.

William Williams left an easy life in North America and journeyed to Venezuela with a vision. His early years in Venezuela were hard years. Mr. Sydney Saword left the Canada to labor with brother Williams. Their labors, along with others, have resulted in rich blessing in that land. In more recent times some have gone to Mexico.

But I wish to encourage the saints both old and young by mentioning some known to the writer who had a vision.

Brother Frank Pearcey lay in the hospital near the end of his sojourn on this earth on this earth. Attached to two IV’s, one on each arm, he made his way along that corridor of the hospital and gave every patient a gospel tract.

We would not leave sisters with no vision. Mrs. William Williams returned home after her husband had passed away in Venezuela. She still had the missionary vision. Legally blind the writer saw her struggling down her

street, groping for the railings of her neighbor's steps to give an invitation to gospel meetings along with a tract.

Another sister, Mrs. Brooks, of the St. Thomas Assembly touched the heart of the writer as she continually requested of him a supply of tracts. I was wondering what she was doing with them. When she passed away another brother also said he could not keep her supplied with tracts. Picture a sister in her 80's, with a beautiful smile, a pleasant, quiet disposition, walking along the main street of the city she lived in and handing out Gospel papers. The hardest man in town could not refuse her offer of a tract. A vision!

The exercise starts in the home area. A brother doing a little work for God. Perhaps a rented space for children's meetings or a building secured for a gospel effort. His work is blessed and by his God. Our world may be our neighbor next door. Those commended full time to the Lord's work should see a little blessing first.

Let me emphasize again that many a soul winner has never occupied a public platform. The Holy Spirit has laid this great work upon their heart and they avail themselves of every opportunity to speak a word for their Lord and Savior.

(continued)

The great care which Christ had for His disciples when He left the world was not to leave them in a quiet world, but to arm them against a troublesome world.

A Surrendered Life

A curious bit of history is related about that wonderful violinist, Paganini. One night, in Paris, where he was to play before a great crowd, as he was tuning his violin, he broke one of the strings—there was tremendous disappointment over the vast audience.

Paganini paid no attention to it, but worked with his thumb again for a while until he broke a second string—then the people began to hiss him slightly. But he went on, and by and by broke a third string—this time they were uproarious against him.

Quietly stepping to the front he said: "Ladies and gentlemen: One string and Paganini,"—and he began to bring such wonderful music out of that one string that the audience strained their necks that they might catch it all—he sat down with the whole house applauding because he had brought so much out of so little.

"One string and Paganini"—a Surrendered soul and God Almighty. Are you willing, are you ready? Because, thank God, the very best is going to be made of your life when you surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christians in a Pagan World, pt. 2

Joel Portman

Looking at the world's conditions, including its opposition to the principles of God's Word and the practice of genuine Christianity, one might think that all is lost and that God's purposes have come to naught. That attitude of despair is not God's intention for us now, nor is it at any time, and there are many passages that have been written to encourage and strengthen the saints. The close of Jude's short epistle serves such a purpose, as it brings to a end his epistle that deals with the inroads of those who are false among the companies of the believers. What he instructs them may seem too simple for some of our day, but those simple principles are of God, and they are effective to preserve believers in any period of time. Let us notice some of the exhortations that he uses to close his epistle:

1. Remember the Words, v.17

The most important preservative for any believer is the truth that has been imparted by Divine inspiration. Joshua was exhorted, upon the passing of Moses in Josh. 1, that "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night,

that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." (1:8). These believers in Jude's epistle, who have been warned about the entrance of evil men and evil teachings among them, are then exhorted to "remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ," (v. 17). That truth imparted by the apostles was authoritative, and it provided the foundation for their faith. It is unchanging truth, given by the Holy Spirit of God, that also contains the warnings so that we might be fore-warned and prepared to face that which is contrary to faith and practice, individually and as assemblies.

The verses following indicate that the words they should remember are the notes of warning that the apostles sounded forth. We remember how Paul warned the elders in Acts 20, telling them that grievous wolves would enter among them, and that even from among themselves would rise those speaking perverse things. His words of warning and counsel (Acts 20:31-35) are very similar to Jude's, reminding them of the unmeasured value of God's Word that they need to remember. May we not become so sophisticated in our lives that we fail to heed the simple, practical importance of God's Holy Word.

One sad failure that is seen in our day is the lack of desire to read God's Word, along with the exercise to meditate on it. Reading has given way to seeing visual images in the form of videos and other presentations, but it is vitally important to take time to concentrate our minds of the truth of Scripture and allow it to saturate our thinking. It is important, also, to memorize portions of the Word of God. Hiding it in our hearts is an invaluable resource to use when we need something to minister to our souls spiritually. A well-known missionary, Geoffrey Bull, from England, who was imprisoned by the communist Chinese while serving the Lord in Tibet, was in solitary confinement for a year without a Bible or other literature. His resource was the memorized Word of God, upon which he fed his soul and meditated in the quietness of his cell. Do we have that capacity if we needed it? It is also the effective sword that the Spirit uses to combat the fiery devices

of the devil (Eph. 6:17). The written Word is essential, but this sword is the hidden Word that is available in those times that we need it.

There is much literature and other materials in this world today that tend to distract us from the essential, but nothing else, including commentaries, devotionals, and other Christian literature, will substitute for the invaluable Word of God in our souls. Read it, to remember it, so you can use it!

2. Build yourselves up on it, v. 20

This emphasizes that "the faith" (v. 3) is the foundation on which we build by our understanding of divine truth and its practice. Some expect that God will do everything to produce this growth in their lives, but exhortations abound that emphasize that the responsibility is ours. The truth that has been given to us is available, but it is only by availing ourselves of its reality and power that we can grow. That growth must be accompanied by practical living, for it is the practice that is the foundation for one's life in time of storm (Mt. 7:24-27).

3. Protect yourselves by Prayer, v. 20

We are to build ourselves up by "praying in the Holy Ghost." We are to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17) which is not to say that we pray without doing anything else, but that we are to be consciously engaged in the inward attitude and activity of prayer. It is an expression of our dependence on God to guard us, guide us, use us, and work through us according to His will. It is a conscious desire to know His will and to live in a continual appreciation of our position and relationship with Him. A great downfall for a believer is the sense of self-sufficiency or independence, whereas a dependent spirit is a safeguard and preservative.

The Lord told His disciples, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation," (Mt. 26:41), but sadly they slept and failed. Are they not like us? The spirit is willing and realizes the importance of this activity, but the flesh is weak. Likely none of us could honestly say that we pray as we should, and this is also a cause of our weakness and failure.

Clearly, praying is more than saying words. Many say "prayers" without praying. Prayer is the deep expression of the heart that

is conscious of its need and dependence on God to meet it. We sing,

“Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire,
Uttered or unexpressed;
The motion of a hidden fire,
That kindles in the breast.”

(James Montgomery, BHB #234)

4. Keep yourselves in God’s Love, v.21

Prayer enables one to know closeness with God, and it enables us to keep ourselves within the sphere where that love can be enjoyed. We all know that God loves us, but it is far different to live in the consciousness of that love. That is the restraint of His love, the constant desire to maintain those conditions of our lives that enable us to actually “bask” in that love. We read of the “love of God” thirteen times in the New Testament, and it is a reality to those who truly love and obey Him. The conditions that Jude describes make one appreciate even more the fact that God loves us, for the sinful world hates those who belong to Christ and seek to live for Him (1 John 3:13, John 15:18).

5. Anticipate deliverance, v. 21

The Lord’s coming is the blessed hope that lies ahead which Jude speaks of as the mercy of God. It will be the means by which believers will be delivered from this present life of potential failure and discouragement to enjoy the reality of eternal life in its fullest aspect. We read in Rom. 8:23 that believers, having the firstfruits of the Spirit, “groan within ourselves, awaiting adoption, the redemption of our body.”

6. Occupy in Active Evangelism, v. 22-23

However one might interpret these verses (whether there are two or three groups referred to), it is clear that we are not to sit idly by and wait for deliverance, but we are to be involved in the work of delivering. We cannot look on the perishing of the world without feeling a great measure of deep concern for them. There are some who are deceived and they need to be enlightened and thus rescued. There are others who are entirely snared in the pitfalls of sin and Satan, and if possible, they need to be rescued. However, one’s involvement in this work can cause defilement, so there needs to be a holy

abhorrence of the sin and any evidence of it in those lives. Our God is a God of mercy and compassion, who longs to save. We have the privilege of laboring with Him in this work as instruments that He can use and it is a responsibility on our part as well. May we use the time as we wait for the Lord’s coming to be actively engaged in seeking to reach souls for Christ.

7. Trust in God to Keep you, v. 24

Ultimately, it is dependence on God and His unlimited power that will keep us. He will not only keep us from stumbling along the way, but the end is assured, in that He will “present you faultless (without blame) before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.” We have a glorious future in Christ, and it is secured entirely through His work and made sure to us through His Word.

Let us go on in faith and hope, looking for that appearing of the One who is our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is coming!

Preparation of Heart

F. G. Watson

“And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjathjearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years; and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord (1 Sam. 7:2).

Israel at this time had been twenty long years away from God. What a sad piece of history this chapter reveals! I wonder how it is with each one of us? Sad to say, many of us are, in a more or less degree, away from God. If a man gets drunk he becomes openly repulsive, he has sinned; he is away from God, but if in the past we have enjoyed the things of God more than at present, then to that degree we have backslidden from the place of nearness; of enjoying fellowship with God. And if we measure ourselves up by that standard none would dare to say, “I am not a backslider.”

There was one redeeming feature about Israel, “They lamented after the Lord.” How much do we lament and long to know more of fellowship with God; to get more out of His

Word; to know more of the sweetness of secret prayer? This ought to be our attitude; this ought to characterize each one of us. Have we a real deep longing to know more and more about the things of Christ; more of daily and hourly fellowship with God.

"And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines" (1 Sam. 7:3).

Are we prepared to put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among us? We may say none would bow down to Baalim and Ashtaroth, but it is very possible for God's people to do so, not to literal images, but everything belonging to the world, the flesh or the devil that occupies the place in our heart that Christ should have; in that measure we are bowing down to Baalim and Ashtaroth—strange gods getting the place in our lives; going back to the things from which God has called us, serving our old Master, looking lightly upon sin, carnal minded and world borrowing, losing the desire to see sinners saved, letting up on our service for Him—all this clearly testifies that strange gods have been getting a place in our lives. God help us to put away the strange gods from among us and "Prepare your hearts unto the Lord." Confession and restoration is indeed to prepare our hearts unto the Lord. We read in Proverbs 16:1, "The preparations of the heart in man, : and the answer of the tongue is from the Lord." It is your place and mine to prepare our hearts to hear the Word of God. The Spirit of God will use the Word of God only if our heart is prepared to receive it. The answer of the tongue is of the Lord; the message must come from God, but it is possible that the message is from God yet I will not profit by it if my heart has not had the necessary preparation.

Mr. Donald Ross was a man used by God in the salvation of souls and a help to God's people. One of his converts at Hamilton conference asked if he was to be there. On hearing that he was not he was disappointed and thought it was hardly worth while coming. He went through the three day's meetings, and heard of others being blessed but he got noth-

ing. Monday morning he went for a walk up the mountain and he discovered that the trouble was he was just disappointed because God wasn't giving him a drink out of the Donald Ross cup he wanted. You see there was the lack of real preparation of heart beforehand. If we are to receive blessing and drawn closer to Himself; if we desire to hear the voice of God there must be preparation of heart, confession of sin and self-judgment, putting away strange gods and Ashtaroth.

Verse 5. And Samuel said, "Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord." The next thing is prayer. First "putting away, then turning back to the Lord."

Verse 6. And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day, and said, "We have sinned against the Lord." "And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh." Verse 9. "And Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the Lord." This is a symbol of weakness. Here they are acknowledging they are just as weak as water; depending wholly upon God and notice God didn't fail them. The children of Israel said to Samuel. "Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that He ,will save us out of the hand of the Philistines." Here we have "putting away strange gods" lamenting, preparation of heart, self-judgment, and humble dependence upon God and continual prayer and God answers and He smote the Philistines and discomfited them, and they were smitten before Israel, and this was the beginning of better days in the history of Israel. From this time on we have Israel gradually rising up until we find them under the glorious reign of Solomon. Here was the turning point—a starting back to days of blessing.

God delights to see His children going on in happy fellowship with Himself. He likes to see souls saved and added to the assembly. Why is it not so? Well might we lament and long for real restoration.

Verse 14. The cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored. The territory was restored. The ground we have lost to the devil in our backsliding will be recovered in the measure we know how to judge sin and humble ourselves and take the place of weakness before God.

Verses 16, 17. "And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh and judged Israel in all those places. And his return was to Ramah for there was his house." What a beautiful circuit, starting at Bethel, "the house of Bread," which speaks of an assembly of God's people, Gilgal, "the place of self-judgment," Mizpeh "Watch Tower," and Ramah means "Heights." If we want to know this last one we must maintain the other three. At Bethel, the house of Bread. Many a Christian has lived for God who was not in the assembly, like Mordecai down in Babylon, but I do not believe anyone can turn their back upon God's truth and live for Him. That is putting away a good conscience and they cannot go on for God.

The way to maintain fellowship with God is to keep at Gilgal, the place of self-judgment and then that will lead you on to Mizpeh, "the watchtower," then the result will be that we will live at Ramah, "Heights." The Lord help us to live more for God for His name's sake.

Be Careful

John R Caldwell
Corinthians 2:5

It is possible to press and reason with one, implying them with text after text, until we get them to admit - as they would admit the truth of a mathematical problem - that Jesus died for sinners, therefore He died for them, and therefore they are saved and have everlasting life. But let us take care that, whilst seeking to meet every difficulty, and make plain the truth of the Gospel from the Word of God, we are ever casting the soul of the enquirer upon God, so that, in receiving the Word, they receive it, not as the word of man, but as the Word of God to their own souls. (See 1 Thess. 2:13.) See that the "believing" is indeed a transaction between their soul and God. What is the value of a profession of conversion if there be not a personal dealing with God Himself and committing of the soul to a living Savior as the result of believing "the Word of the truth of the Gospel."

Sufferings

"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps." (1 Peter 2:21)

Peter's first epistle, written during a time of bitter persecution, deals with the matter of suffering. Peter reminds us that Christ suffered for us and that it is a privilege to suffer for Him. We are "called" to suffering and should "think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try" us (4:12).

Christ's suffering was foretold (1:11), as is ours. We see that He had patience, humility, and submission in His sufferings (2:23) in order to bear "our sins in his own body on the tree" (2:24). He suffered unjustly, "the just for the unjust" (3:18), not only in His spirit, but "Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh" (4:1), being witnessed personally by Peter (5:1).

Since we are likewise "called" to suffer, Peter explains that we also will be "suffering wrongfully" (2:19) even "when ye do well" (v. 20). We will "suffer for righteousness' sake" (3:14) and "for well doing" (v. 17). To avoid being taken by surprise, we are to prepare ourselves to suffer "in the flesh" (4:1), if need be. We will "be reproached for the name of Christ" (4:14) and should "not be ashamed" if we "suffer as a Christian" (4:16). It is much better to suffer in such a way than to have done something evil to deserve it (v. 15).

Suffering while following Christ's example is "acceptable with God" (2:20), and even makes us "happy" (3:14; 4:14). Through it we can "glorify God on this behalf" (4:16) because it is "according to the will of God" (4:19). There is even a magnificent reward awaiting the sufferer (5:10).

In view of all of this, there is little wonder that Peter says, "Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (4:13).

(quoted from DOP)