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"The Word was God" John 1:1-2

Gaius Goff

Our minds are limited in their ability to truly grasp the concept of eternity. It's very difficult to explain something without a beginning or an end in words. Sometimes, a marble, a ring, or any circle is used to try to represent what infinity is like. Despite how vague our understanding of things beyond our experience, there is much we can believe by faith—and much we can do through faith.

When we read of "The Word" already existing in the beginning, we wonder what that "Word" is and what the beginning refers to. Is "The Word" a speech unit? Is it a principle of reason, as the Greeks taught many years ago? Or was David correct when he wrote, "The Word of the Lord is right, and all His works are done in truth?" "By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth." The spoken Word performed the very first act of creation on the world: "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." To the Jewish people, "The Word" was another way of expressing God.

"In the beginning was the Word," John wrote, which would be readily accepted by the Jews as an expression for God. Then came the statement, "And the Word was with God." What is this? Another distinct personality, separate from God? This is not just a vague idea or passing comment but a statement that there was Someone "in the beginning with God." Then John's words would really arouse the readers' attention (as they should): "The Word was God." The impact of the word "was" is that in each use in this verse, it is continuous, with no beginning or end. This does not mark time segments such as years or centuries. This Person, whom John wrote about, eternally existed as God because He is God.

In the first fourteen verses of John 1, "The Word" is repeated. By grouping those phrases that describe the theme introduced in verse 1, we can learn more about "The Word" quickly. "In the beginning was the Word" [v.1]; "And the Word became flesh..." [v.14]. "And the Word was with God" [v.1], and the Word "dwelt among us" [v.14]. "And the Word was God" [v.1], and the Word was "full of grace and truth" [v.14]. It is impossible for anyone to fully explain God. However, the theme of the Gospel of John is that God is explaining Himself to us in ways we can understand. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself."

To the Jews reading this, there would likely be an immediate hostile response when they see this "Word" identified as the Lord Jesus Christ. To Greeks, this might seem like a foolish idea. But to us who know Him and believe in Him wholeheartedly, this is a wonder of wonders. Our Lord and Savior is the Eternal God! He is not like God. He is not merely a god, nor is He only godlike. He does not just have a divine nature. He is the One True God - and yet, in these words, two Persons are mentioned. In this first verse of the book, which teaches us the truth that Jesus is God, there is a statement that reveals the two Persons of the Trinity that we call the Godhead.

Verse two not only repeats what was said in verse one but also teaches us who He is and what He is. He always was. He did not come into being at a specific time. He did not become a Person when He was conceived in the virgin Mary's womb. He existed as a Person from all eternity. He is, always was, and always will be, the Eternal Son of God. He did not become a son; He always was the Son. He did not become God after His crucifixion and resurrection, as some religions teach. The physical changes He took on after His resurrection did not make Him any more than He had been before. By His own choice, He limited Himself as a man when He made Himself known among men. His character never changed. His power was never limited — He only limited the use of His powers to keep showing who He was and what He could do.

The theme of the book is established right in the first verses. It is then illustrated and described through a wide variety of examples and in the teaching He gave during encounters with different people in various life situations. In this book, He often offers profound lessons when engaging with individuals.

Personal contact and communication with individuals are fundamental ways of conveying faithful words to "faithful men, that they may teach others also." The entire Gospel of John is presented to us so we will not misunderstand who the Lord Jesus Christ is—demonstrating His deity and humanity in the same Person—and to show the results God expects from this study: "that believing ye might have life through His name."

To apply my learning and conduct in life, I must be careful to stay within the boundaries of scripture while allowing divine truth to challenge me to conform to the One in whom I believe. Trying to define the indefinable is a significant waste of time. However, understanding Jesus as God is a profound truth worth pursuing. To conceive of One who is eternal in His being and in all His existence is difficult for us, who measure time and space and are limited by distance.

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A monthly publication that is freely available on the Internet and is intended to help 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.

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So, I freely admit there are things far beyond my understanding, but in faith I know they are not beyond my spiritual comprehension because God has intentionally chosen to reveal to us Jesus as "The Word." I place my personal faith in Him and, with joy, accept Him as Lord. When I take that step of faith, difficult things become clearer. I can accept that the One on the throne in heaven was sent to earth. There was a purpose in God's mind when Emmanuel came here to dwell. Some things that are impossible to fully grasp in words must be demonstrated to be real. His coming as a man was a great act of grace when He who was rich became poor. I know if He had not been willing to come, every person would be lost forever.

He who was God and was with God became a man to be here with humanity, to reach people on the earth that was His footstool. He crossed a vast gap, deliberately limiting the use of His almighty power and divine authority, and humbled Himself. As the God-Man, He was human but never ceased to be divine. His creative powers were not limited, but to identify with us, He was found in human form so that we would trust in Him who is truly one of us. Every step of His life, every miracle performed: turning water into wine, walking on water, and calming a storm, proved that His powers were not diminished; they were His to use when He chose to. Through "The Word that dwelt with us," we can be eternally blessed.

Christ made Himself to be like us so that He might make us to be like Him.

The Wideness of God's Love

Joel Portman

We often quote and revel in the amazing words of John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life". No matter what version of the Holy Scriptures one uses, those words glow with the resplendency of an expression of love that knows no compare, a love that transcends human thought or comprehension, and an expression of unmerited grace and favor that is never found in any human relation. It is Divine love, and only One who is infinite in every attribute can possibly manifest it. The truth that it contains is so vast that Henry Moorhouse, having been invited by D. L. Moody to preach in his church in Chicago, took it as his text for an entire week of preaching in that tabernacle and still hadn't exhausted its fullness.

The poet, Frederick Faber, has written,

"There's a wideness in God's mercy,
like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in His justice
which is more than liberty.

For the love of God is broader
than the measure of our mind;
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind."

God's Love for the World

Those who preach the gospel need not and should not limit their proclamation of the love of God for all men. That love was expressed in a multiplicity of ways, but it is primarily centered in His giving His only begotten Son to endure the suffering of the Cross in our stead. That is certainly the focus of Jn. 3:16. God's Word leaves us no reason to question the extent of that love for mankind without restriction or distinction. At times we sing the words of this hymn by R. D. Edwards;

Oh, the love of God is boundless,
Perfect, causeless, full and free!
Doubts have vanished, fears are groundless,
Now I know that love to me.
Love, the source of all my blessing;
Love, that set itself on me;
Love, that gave the spotless Victim;
Love, told out at Calvary.
'Twas love displayed by Jesus,
'Twas love displayed by Jesus,

We can freely preach to sinners that God loves them and that He has proven that love. 1 Jn. 4:9 tells us, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." Those who attempt to limit that love so that it embraces only a select few are violating the language of our New Testament. To divide God's love into two portions, as if there were a limited kind of love for all mankind but a different love for "the elect" has no basis in the Bible. We are warned against adding to the Scriptures (Prov. 30:6), yet some insert the words, "the elect world," as the object of God's love. God's Word is never restricted like that. Consider Tit. 3:4, "But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared..."; we shouldn't seek to limit that to only those who are "elect". To do so also violates the principles of proper grammar. God says what He means, and we should gladly accept the expansive truth of it. There is no limit implied in that verse, especially when one considers the context that describes man's utter unworthiness.

We usually act in a manner that is consistent with our nature, and it is so with God also. He loves,

because He is Love! Just as His actions are holy and just because He is holy and just, so He loves because it is His nature. And because God is infinite in every respect, His love transcends our capacity to understand it completely. So we probe the fringes of its expression with thankfulness in our hearts that He has expressed that love toward us who are so unworthy!

The love of God is universal in its scope, as wide as the entire world of men. It includes every individual and excludes nobody. God's love for the world has resulted in His grace that provides salvation that is available to all, and we read in Tit. 2:11, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men hath appeared." J. N. Darby wrote, "Grace has appeared. It has appeared, not limited to a particular people, but to all men; not charged with temporal promises and blessings, but bringing salvation. It comes from God to men with salvation. It does not expect righteousness from men; it brings salvation to those that need it. Precious and simple truth, which makes us know God, which puts us in our place, but according to the grace which has overleaped every barrier in order to address itself, in the sovereign goodness of God, to every man on the earth!" In 1 Tim. 2:4, Paul writes, "Who will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth"...who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time". Adam Clarke's comments are, "Because he wills the salvation of all men; therefore, he wills that all men should be prayed for. In the face of such a declaration, how can any Christian soul suppose that God ever unconditionally and eternally reprobated any man? Those who can believe so, one would suppose, can have little acquaintance either with the nature of God, or the bowels of Christ." Those are words that express the expansiveness of God's heart. If, in His love, He desires that all men be saved, then the provision of His Son at the cross must be a provision for all men, for if otherwise, how could those words be true without adding to them? Again, Paul writes in 1 Tim. 4:10 that He, the living God, "is the Savior of all men, specially of those who believe." Some would limit this to His being the preserver of all men in a physical aspect, but the context shows that it is spiritual salvation that he has in view. Dean Alford writes, "His will is that all men should be saved, and He has made full and sufficient provision for the salvation of all: so that, as far as salvation stands in Him, He is the Savior of all men. And it is in virtue of this universality of salvation offered by God, that we have rested our hopes on Him and become believers, especially them that believe (in these alone does that universal salvation, which God has provided, become actual. He is the same towards and of all: but these alone appropriate His salvation)."

It's not the purpose of this article to delve into the thorny subject of election and predestination, which, in its context, always applies to believers and not to the salvation or reprobation of unbelievers. It is to consider

the capacity and expression of One who is infinite in every attribute and expression thereof. How God could look upon a world of rebellious, sinful, corrupted mankind and do so with love for this world is beyond our comprehension. It is an expression of His expansive love that exceeds our ability to comprehend, whether considered in its expression, its cost, or its objects. It is a subject that cannot be plumbed or exhausted, but which provides much comfort, assurance, and material for meditation that causes worship from the heart.

The particularity of that love is what swept the soul of the apostle Paul and caused his willingness to suffer all things in order to respond to the reality that God loved him. After describing the universal condition of man, including him, in sin, Paul writes, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us." (Eph. 2:4). Those words seem to embrace the wonder of his soul that should also be expressed in ours, when he recollected the fact that his course of life was no different from that of the vilest sinners of this world. And similar words are used by John in 1 Jn. 4:10, when he writes, "Herein is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins." Everyone saved by the matchless grace of God can rejoice in that great truth, and the remembrance of how that love was expressed should constantly move our hearts and cause our greatest expressions of worship to Him.

Jude's exhortation, as he summarizes the need for constant exercise of a believer in the midst of an ungodly world, is to "keep yourselves in the love of God," (Jude 21). Hamilton Smith wrote, "As Christians we all admit the fact that God loves us, but it is another thing to live in the consciousness of His love. Yet what is more important, or more blessed, than to walk in the constant sense that we are loved by God! The religious world - Cain's world - may hate us; many of God's dear people may misunderstand us, but God loves us. Circumstances may be difficult, sorrows may accumulate, and evil may abound; but if we keep ourselves in the love of God, none of these things will be allowed to call in question the glorious fact that the love of God, expressed in Christ, is streaming down upon us through the opened heavens. Just as we are kept in the love of God, we shall be delivered from love of the world (1 Jn. 2:15); kept in love with the saints (1 Jn. 5:1); and led out in love to the sinner (2 Cor. 5:14)."

Christ's Love for the Believer

It seems that majorly, though not exclusively, the love of Christ is seen toward individuals or more limited entities. Even as the young ruler turned his back on the Savior in Mk. 10:21, we read those tender words, "Jesus beholding him loved him". It must have burdened His heart to see one who considered His terms excessive going away. But despite His love for him, He didn't force him or coerce him to change his mind. He loved

him no less when he refused than when he came. It is wonderful to realize that though no one is forced against their will to receive the Savior, He will not insist that they do so. All who come to Him and trust Him are responding in some way to the manifest love of Christ for them.

It was a constant reality to the apostle Paul that Christ had loved him and given Himself for him. He wrote in Gal. 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life that I now live, I live by the faith of Him who loved me and gave himself for me." It was "the love of Christ (not his love for Christ) that constrained him in his service. He appropriates to himself, as Chrysostom observes, the love which belongs equally to the whole world. For Christ is indeed the personal friend of each man individually; and is as much to him, as if He had died for him alone." (Lightfoot). But Paul continues by writing, "And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." We notice that beautiful expression again, "he died for all," even though there are those who will be eternally lost. But it will not be without His love being directed toward them. We have often heard it said that there are many who go to hell unsaved but they don't go unloved. They have rejected Him and turned their hard heart against His love for them even though He provided salvation for their souls.

Again, we read in Eph. 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;". His love for all men is genuine, but those who are believers and who compose the church can appreciate the greater reality of that love since they are basking in its full enjoyment. His love for His blood-bought bride is the highest standard that could be presented to husbands in terms of their love for their wives. It is the pattern of genuine, unreserved, and personal love.

Some would say that Jesus loved John more than the other disciples, and perhaps that is so. But the gospels don't say that. We only read that John was a disciple who Jesus loved (Jn. 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:20), and it is John who wrote those words. It might be that every one of them and of us could say the same, and the more that we understand His tender heart, the more precious that love is as we enjoy its reality. John Heading wrote, "But the narrative switches from the worst (Judas) to the best--to the apostle John, "whom Jesus loved"; not that the Lord loved John more than He loved the others, but John appreciated this love more than the others." The thought that I am loved by the Son of God and that He expressed His love for me by giving Himself for my sins makes that very real in a personal sense. Jesus loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (Jn. 11:5), but He also loved all who had come to Him. There is a sense that the intimacy of that love could be expressed and enjoyed in a greater way with

them than with others, since they shared a higher relationship with each other than others enjoyed.

So it is no wonder that John, in his first epistle, mentions the love of God so frequently and also stresses those conditions necessary so that we might know the "love of the Father" (2:15). Is that not a precious truth to bask in, "the love of the Father?" In our appreciation of its truth, would it not enable and stimulate us to maintain those conditions in heart and life so that we might truly enjoy it! There are many elements in this wicked world that seek to draw our hearts away and ruin our capacity to enjoy that love, but it is so precious to those who have tasted its sweetness in the soul.

The love of God is so vast and full that many pages could be written on the subject. Poets have penned lines of words in their attempts to describe and exhaust the plenary love that is in God's heart and which has been expressed toward unloving men. In addition to the few expressions written above, we also read of the "love of the Spirit" in Rom. 15:30, which is the love that has been inculcated in our hearts and forms the basis of our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ, and which should be manifested in our relationships with one another. This article must close and will do so by quoting a familiar hymn that Frederick Lehman wrote:

The love of God is greater far,
than tongue or pen can ever tell;
It goes beyond the highest star,
and reaches to the lowest hell.
The guilty pair, bowed down with care,
God gave His Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled,
And pardoned from his sin.

Ref: O love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure:
the saints' and angels' song.

When years of time shall pass away
and earthly thrones and kingdoms fall,
when men who here refuse to pray,
on rocks and hills and mountains call,
God's love so pure shall still endure,
all measureless and strong;
redeeming grace to Adam's race—
the saints' and angels' song.

Could we with ink the ocean fill
and were the skies of parchment made,
were ev'ry stalk on earth a quill
and ev'ry man a scribe by trade,
to write the love of God above
would drain the ocean dry;

nor could the scroll contain the whole,
tho' stretched from sky to sky.

"If heaven is by grace alone, then hell is by works alone and the Christ rejecter will have to work his way past every obstacle the love of God can put before him on his downward path to perdition" R. McClurkin

One of God's Patterns: Six, Then One

Jim Brown

While reading the first five verses of Joshua chapter six today, it occurred to me that God uses recognizable patterns in his dealings with mankind and with his own people. In a nutshell, God instructed Joshua to have the priests encircle the city of Jericho once each day for six days, blowing trumpets, as if to send forth a warning. On the seventh day, there was to be one last long blast given and then the priests were to circle the city not once, but seven times. The notes following hope to illustrate a few of God's "six, then one" designs.

Six, Then One in Creation

The familiar story of God's glorious creation needs little introduction or explanation. Suffice to say, some inanimate things (day, night, land, water) were created in the first two days, plant life on the third day, the sun, moon and stars on the fourth day and all beasts were created on day five. All this was in God's plan to establish a setting for the sixth day when man was created. Man was created in the image of the Triune God for an entirely different purpose than for all that was created in the first five days, namely, a rich one-to-one relationship. Prior to sin committed in chapter three, there was no need for God to show most of his divine attributes since their recipients possessed no definite need of them. The need arose when sin came in. When God finished His creation, he saw that all was very good (Gen. 1:31). On the seventh day He rested. At this point, only one of seven recognized subdivisions, or dispensations of time involving God's unique dealings with mankind existed, that of innocence.

Six, Then One in the Sabbath Day

The last of the five Godward commandments given in Ex. 20 refers to the sabbath day, which for the Jews is our Saturday. Notice that the giving of that commandment in verses 10-11 mimics the creation story and is noted to be "the sabbath of the Lord Thy God". There is a lovely picture here in that God would desire His people should have rest every seven days just as He did in

creation. While it does form part of the 10 commandments as being law, even involving punishment if it were unobserved, it was given with benevolent intention. How sadly misguided and cruel were the religious leaders in Israel who used this law to upbraid our Lord for having allegedly broken it while healing someone. Also, a careful reading of the entire chapter of Deuteronomy 15 reveals the kind, merciful heart of God regarding the sabbatical year, a year of released obligation, and note again, it was to occur every seventh year.

Six, Then One in the Hebrew Servant Law

Not much to say here, other than the pattern of six, then one, is maintained. We might note that “freedom” seems to be what is promoted here. We cannot say categorically that God approves of slavery, especially since it was from slavery the Hebrews of the Exodus story needed His rescue from. However, this once-every-seven-year event testifies to a sense of God’s quest for human liberty (commensurate with his noted hatred of oppression). “Going out free” reminds us of the conversation the Lord had with Jewish leaders who insisted they were not in bondage in Jn. 8:35-36. He could respond, “A servant abideth not in the house forever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed”.

Six, Then One at Jericho

We’ve already looked at this story from Joshua 6 at the onset, but it might be noticed that there are two sets of seven in the story: the seven days of circling and trumpet-blowing and the seven times the priests were to circle Jericho on the seventh day (akin to the seven years of 70th week tribulation?) after six days of circling only one day. We observe that the priests must be of the tribe of Levi. They are the only tribe of the twelve not called upon for military duty. It is most interesting to note that they, rather than any others Joshua might have chosen, are used to demonstrate God’s power and judgment as seen later in the chapter when the entire city is leveled, save Rahab and her family. It was done without a sword being drawn. We will develop this in the next section with reference to Rev. 19:20-21 where 7 years, not seven days mark similar results.

Six, Then One in Dispensations, Churches, and End times

Most, though not all, will agree with C. I. Scofield’s assessment of dispensations as eras of time having to do with God’s various dealings with mankind. These are: Innocence, Conscience, Government, Promise, Law, Grace and Kingdom. If we consider a timetable, we believe we are currently near the end of the sixth dispensation, grace, mentioned in the list above. Add to that, in one more subset within this sixth dispensation (aka the church age) we also see ourselves very much im-

mersed in the spirit of the seventh and last (Laodicea) of seven church conditions observed by the Lord in Rev. 2-3 and by Paul in 2 Tim. 3:1-5 and 4:1-4.

By now, we should see a pattern of completion or fulfillment as well as one of rest linked with the number seven. The professing church, well on its way to full-blown apostasy, will be vacated by the true church comprised of all those who have been saved when a final trump is blown. That trump (1 Thess. 4:13-18) will not only sound out the catching away of the Lord’s people, as pictured in Gentile Rahab’s preservation in Joshua 6, but will also chronologically pronounce the beginning of the end (doom) on all accountable Christ-rejecting earth-dwellers, reminiscent of Jericho’s bitter end (See Lk. 13:25, Rev. 3:10).

We know that six is man’s number as he was created on the sixth day by God and the last book of our bible shows the number of a man is six hundred, six score and six (Revelation 13:18). This passage refers to the beast who wields all economic and political power in the world during last days, especially “the time of Jacob’s trouble” which will mark the remaining 3.5 years of Daniel’s 70th week prophesied in Dan. 9:26-27. That man of sin (see 2 Thess. 2:1-11) and his kingdom, Babylon, (read Rev. 17-18) like that of Belshazzar and the original Babylon, will fall just like we read about Jericho falling. The beast is Satan’s man, summed up numerically with three sixes and his reign is finished within the sixth dispensation, ironically, of God’s grace. Our Lord Jesus Christ is God in the Person of the Son and is also God’s Man, seated in glory. He comes to begin the seventh and final dispensation with a long-awaited rest, similar to creation rest, but He first must consign both the beast and the false prophet to the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20) and in the next verse, the beast’s armies. There’ll be no need for human military intervention. Then, having arrived on earth as per Zech. 12:10, 14:4), a judgment of nations must also take place to separate out those still living at the end of the 70th week to determine who will go into the kingdom and who will be cast into the lake of fire forthwith (Matt. 25:31-46).

It’s interesting to note that although the number of weeks in Daniel’s prophecy is 70, it’s still showing the completion theme relative to the number seven, albeit in 10’s. And it marks a culmination of 69 “weeks” that will be devastatingly finalized in the 70th week. The distance between the 69th week and the 70th week has already lasted over 2,000 years. Given the truth of 2 Pet. 3:8-9, it is not surprising that the dispensation of grace has lasted longer than any other, but Gen. 6:3 reminds us God’s mercy will have an end. Six always gives way to seven at some point in the Lord’s designs. It is wonderful to know that the Lord’s desire is toward the restitution of all things (Acts 3:21) and a glorious time of rest, as it was on the seventh day of creation. It will finally be realized by all who love His appearing when the Lord plants His feet back on earth and estab-

lishes His reign of righteousness and peace, thus igniting the seventh and final era of God's earthly dealings with the human race.

The secret of the prayer of faith is the life of faith.

The Misunderstood Doctrine

A. W. Tozer

In the Divine Scheme of salvation the doctrine of faith is central. God addresses His words to faith, and where no faith is, no true revelation is possible. "Without faith it is impossible to please him."

Every benefit flowing from the atonement of Christ comes to the individual through the gateway of faith. Forgiveness, cleansing, regeneration, the Holy Spirit, and all answers to prayer, are given to faith and received by faith. There is no other way. This is common evangelical doctrine and is accepted wherever the cross of Christ is understood.

Because faith is so vital to all our hopes, so necessary to the fulfillment of every aspiration of our hearts, we dare take nothing for granted concerning it. Anything that carries with it so much of weal or woe, which indeed decides our heaven or our hell, is too important to neglect. We simply must not allow ourselves to be uninformed or misinformed. We must know.

For a number of years my heart has been troubled over the doctrine of faith as it is received and taught among evangelical Christians everywhere. Great emphasis is laid upon faith in orthodox circles, and that is good; but still I am troubled. Specifically, my fear is that the modern conception of faith is not the Biblical one; that when the teachers of our day use the word they do not mean what Bible writers meant when they used it.

The causes of my uneasiness are these:

1. The lack of spiritual fruit in the lives of so many who claim to have faith.
2. The rarity of a radical change in the conduct and general outlook of persons professing their new faith in Christ as their personal Savior.
3. The failure of our teachers to define or even describe the thing to which the word faith is supposed to refer.
4. The heartbreaking failure of multitudes of seekers, be they ever so earnest, to make anything out of the doctrine or to receive any satisfying experience through it.

5. The real danger that a doctrine that is parroted so widely and received so uncritically by so many is false as understood by them.

6. I have seen faith put forward as a substitute for obedience, an escape from reality, a refuge from the necessity of hard thinking, a hiding place for weak character. I have known people to miscall by the name of faith high animal spirits, natural optimism, emotional thrills and nervous tics.

7. Plain horse sense ought to tell us that anything that makes no change in the man who professes it makes no difference to God either, and it is an easily observable fact that for countless numbers of persons the change from no-faith to faith makes no actual difference in the life.

Perhaps it will help us to know what faith is if we first notice what it is not. It is not the 'believing' of a statement we know to be true. The human mind is so constructed that it must of necessity believe when the evidence presented to it is convincing. It cannot help itself. When the evidence fails to convince, no faith is possible. No threats, no punishment, can compel the mind to believe against clear evidence.

Faith based upon reason is faith of a kind, it is true; but it is not of the character of Bible faith, for it follows the evidence infallibly and has nothing of a moral or spiritual nature in it. Neither can the absence of faith based upon reason be held against anyone, for the evidence, not the individual, decides the verdict. It would take salvation out of the realm of the volitional and place it in the mental, where, according to the Scriptures, it surely does not belong.

True faith rests upon the character of God and asks no further proof than the moral perfections of the One who cannot lie. It is enough that God said it, and if the statement should contradict every one of the five senses and all the conclusions of logic as well, still the believer continues to believe. "Let God be true, but every man a liar," is the language of true faith. Heaven approves such faith because it rises above mere proofs and rests in the bosom of God.

In recent years among certain evangelicals there has arisen a movement designed to prove the truths of Scriptures by appeal to science. Evidence is sought in the natural world to support supernatural revelation. Snowflakes, blood, stones, strange marine creatures, birds and many other natural objects are brought forward as proof that the Bible is true. This is touted as being a great support to faith, the idea being that if a Bible doctrine can be proved to be true, faith will spring up and flourish as a consequence.

What these brethren do not see is that the very fact that they feel a necessity to seek proof for the truths of the Scriptures proves something else altogether, namely, their own basic unbelief. When God speaks unbelief asks, "How shall I know that this is true?" I AM THAT I AM is the only grounds for faith. To dig among

the rocks or search under the sea for evidence to support the Scriptures is to insult the One who wrote them. Certainly, I do not believe that this is done intentionally; but I cannot see how we can escape the conclusion that it is done, nevertheless.

Faith as the Bible knows it is confidence in God and His Son Jesus Christ; it is the response of the soul to the divine character as revealed in the Scriptures; and even this response is impossible apart from the prior in-working of the Holy Spirit. Faith is the response to God by a penitent soul and has nothing whatsoever to do with the senses or the data they afford. Faith is a miracle; it is the ability God gives to trust His Son, and anything that does not result in action in accord with the will of God is not faith but something else short of it.

Faith and morals are two sides of the same coin. Indeed the very essence of faith is moral. Any professed faith in Christ as personal Savior that does not bring the life under plenary obedience to Christ as Lord is inadequate and must betray its victim at the last.

The man that believes will obey; failure to obey is convincing proof that there is not true faith present. Where real repentance is, there is obedience; for repentance is not only sorrow for past failures and sins, it is a determination to begin now to do the will of God as He reveals it to us.

Obedience vs Disobedience

Carlos Fariñas

"He is the Rock, His work is perfect, For all His ways are right; A God of truth, and without any iniquity in Him; He is just and upright. Corruption is not His; the blemish belongs to His children, A crooked and perverse generation."

Since the beginning of human history, God has desired close communion with His creatures; to this end, He has given commandments that teach us how to please Him and how to live while enjoying the peace that only His fellowship produces.

By studying this history—written by God Himself—and analyzing the conduct of all humanity, we can conclude that every era of human history can be summarized in just two words: OBEDIENCE and DISOBEDIENCE to God's ordinances.

I will mention two biblical passages to illustrate the consequences of living a life of obedience or disobedience to the Lord:

1. Let us read Joshua chapter 6. There, we find the details of the conquest of Jericho, when Israel crossed the Jordan under Joshua's command. Let us note three aspects of the account:

a) God gave Joshua instructions that might have seemed absurd; although the people were armed and ready for war, God commanded them to march around the walled city for six consecutive days—once each day—accompanied by seven priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant and blowing trumpets. On the seventh day, they were to circle the city seven times; at the end, the trumpets would sound, and the entire people would shout. God told him that when they did this, the wall would collapse on its own, allowing them to ascend, capture the city, and set it on fire. They might have thought that, while marching, they could be attacked and defeated from the city walls. There was no logical explanation for how mere marching, the sound of trumpets, and the people's shouts could bring down those walls.

b) Despite any doubts or questions that might have arisen, they chose to submit to God and obey without objection.

c) We see the results of obedience. Verses 20 and 21 detail that once the command was carried out, the walls collapsed and the people destroyed all the city's inhabitants by the edge of the sword; they burned the entire city with fire, and the account ends with this beautiful statement: "So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land."

2. Now let us consider another Scripture, which leads us to reflect on the path of disobedience to God's Word and its inevitable consequences. Let us read Jud. 2:7a, 8, 10-12a; 14-15. Here we see a lesson contrasting with the one previously considered. Perhaps the failure begins with a lack of due regard for the words of Moses in Deut. 32:46, which says: "Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe—all the words of this law"; and likewise, the words of Solomon in Prov. 22:6, which says: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." God demands complete, not partial, obedience, and the result of failing to do so is that:

1. They did not know God.
2. They turned away from the God of their fathers.

3. Ultimately, they went after idols. It is very sad to read verse 15, which says: "Wherever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for calamity, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn to them; and they were greatly distressed."

Beloved brothers, obeying our God may seem contrary to everything we have learned and experienced over the years; yet, if we exercise faith—which is simply believing even when we neither understand nor see God—blessing is assured. Conversely, if we choose to disobey, let us be aware that we will be provoking the wrath of our God.

Wilderness Experiences in Faith

Franklin Ferguson

In turning to the 8th chapter of Deuteronomy, verses 12-10, there are striking references made of the experiences of God's ancient people Israel, during their journey across the desert to the land of promise. And seeing that "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning," we may gather much instruction and help from the records of that unique nation.

We, too, are strangers and pilgrims on the earth, journeying to a heavenly country (Heb. 11:13-16), and the experiences which the Lord passes His church through, very closely correspond with those of the saints of old time.

Let us notice some of the things in Israel's spiritual training:

1). A life under the guidance of God—"the Lord thy God led thee" (verse 2). Moses had no chart of the way they had to go, neither were there any among the people who had been on the road before and could act as guides. What did that matter? "The Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way" (Ex. 13:21); at the commandment of the Lord they encamped and at His commandment they journeyed; the cloud might remain stationary two days, or a month, or a year, as He saw fit (see Num. 9:16-23). Oh, favored people, having God to lead them all the desert through! We now have His Holy Spirit with us all the way, with the full revelation of His Word for our guidance, and access to Him at all times by prayer and supplication; therefore we shall know the path wherein we should walk, if we keep our soul in close fellowship with our Lord.

2). It was a life of humility before God—"to humble thee" (verse 2). To travel in company with God required a spirit of humility. Many a hard lesson is needful to abase the pride and curb the self-assertiveness of the human heart. How often did the pride of their hearts bring destruction upon them, and their haughtiness of spirit led to many a fall (Prov. 16:18). God's servant Moses was a great contrast to the people over whom he had been placed. We read that he was very meek, above all men (Num. 12:3), otherwise he would have been quite unfitted for the high position he held. There was none like unto Moses whom the Lord knew face to face (Deut. 34:10); beautiful type, truly, of our Lord who said, "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29).

3). It was a life of testing by God—"to prove thee" (verse 2). When a difficulty or perplexity confronted them, it was just placed there to prove what was really in their hearts and to see whether they would keep the commandments of their God. Trials are painful, and we cannot be exempted from them; but all are sent for our ultimate good, to separate the dross from us, that after the ordeal is over we may, like Job of old, "come forth as gold." How often Israel failed because they limited the

Holy One and murmured at His ways with them. When His word should have satisfied their hearts and assured them of His faithfulness, they willfully disbelieved. Nevertheless the patience of God with His people is truly wonderful and He who brought them out of Egypt into the wilderness unto Himself, did not give them up. And we may say, "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end" (Jn. 13:1).

4). It was a life sustained from God—"He fed them" (verse 3). All around in that great desert was nothing to support life; they must all have died had God not given the daily manna from heaven. No single day did their food supply fail those forty years; and the water of the smitten rock followed them (1 Cor. 10:3-4). Those forty years they lacked nothing, even their clothes wore not out, and in His manifold mercies He forsook them not (Neh. 9:19-21). Their sustenance was from God alone, and they lived to prove it. Israel's God is our God, who has pledged Himself to "supply all our need, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).

5). It was a life of total dependence on God—"by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live" (verse 3). They had to learn there was more than mere bread required to sustain them—their souls needed every word of God. They had found themselves dependent upon Him for all temporal requirements; they had to learn the further lesson that the soul has its needs too, which the Lord alone can meet by His word. It seems to take a long time for us to learn the lesson, "without Me ye can do nothing," and to lean hard upon Him all the days.

6). It was a life of hope in God—the prospect of the promised land (verses 7-9). The far reaching monotonous stretches of sand, and the tireless landscape was not to meet their sight for ever; a little longer and then a land, the finest on earth was to be theirs, most beautiful and abundantly fruitful. So they journeyed on in hope of reaching Canaan and the enjoyment of all the promised goodness. They hoped in God, and not in man. We, too, seek a country, a better, that is, a heavenly; it is the paradise of God, and its glory gleams afar, seen by faith's vision.

7). When they should reach the land, it was to be a life of praise—"Thou shalt bless the Lord" (verse 10). Yet, it was not alone His purpose that only then they should bless Him; they should meantime offer praises for daily mercies and anticipated blessings. Did ever a people have more cause to be a thanksgiving people than Israel of old time? With God so near to them, caring so minutely for them, with promises of so great blessings in the future! By all their wilderness experiences may we learn the same lessons meant to teach them and strive by grace divine to succeed better than they, that the Lord may be glorified.