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The Joy of the Lord in Psalm 16, pt 1

Walter Gustafson

This truly is a messianic Psalm. One definition of a messianic Psalm is that it should be quoted in the New Testament as referring to Christ. The apostle Peter and the apostle Paul both quote this Psalm with reference to the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:24-31 and Acts 13:34-37, respectively). In interpreting a messianic Psalm, we should be careful to note what part of the Psalm refers to Christ. Psalm 41 is messianic, but it has only one verse that refers to Christ. And to be more accurate, only one phrase of that verse is messianic (part of v. 9 is quoted in John 13:18).

But there are messianic Psalms where the whole Psalm goes beyond the experience of the Psalmist, such as Psalm 22 and Psalm 16. The words in Psalm 16:10b cannot refer to the Psalmist himself, 'neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption'. Paul specifically says (in Acts 13:36) that David saw corruption. The words in v. 8, 'I have set the Lord always before Me', cannot refer to David in an absolute sense. So, while the Psalm firstly refers to David's own faith, hope and joy, we must look beyond David's incomplete experience to see the verse's complete fulfillment in the Son of God. So, in this article we will be looking at every verse as coming from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ.

His Joy in Trust (v.1) 'Preserve me, O God: for in Thee do I put My trust'

His trust was perfect. He was always completely dependent on His God and Father and His heart was at rest. Here is His prayer for the continuance of the joy He had already found. In this Psalm (of only 11 verses), God is addressed 18 times: as 'Jehovah' or 'Lord' four times (vv. 2, 5, 7, 8), once 'El' (v. 1), once 'Adonai' (v. 2), once 'Who' (v. 7), and once 'He' (v. 8), and 10 times as 'Thou', 'Thee', 'Thy', or 'Thine'. Thus, the Lord Jesus is showing that His eyes are toward Him, and His dependence is directly on God. In Hebrews 2:13a, the writer quotes the words of Christ, 'I will put My trust in Him', to show that this princi-

ple of trust is evidence that the Messiah was truly man, perfectly human.

In this Psalm, we see some of the principles that governed His life down here and gave Him joy. Here, we are brought into the presence of the most beautiful life ever lived. This Psalm is truly the meal offering Psalm: the fine flour, with no unevenness in it; He had every desirable characteristic in perfect blend. The more we contemplate Him, the more we will worship from our hearts and the more we will want to be like Him.

It is remarkable that the Lord Jesus spoke of His joy immediately before the cross. It is also exceedingly precious to contemplate that, even though Christ had the infinite sorrow of the cross before Him, He was concerned (in His farewell ministry) for the eleven and for us, that we might have His joy fulfilled in ourselves (John 15:9-11; 17:13). Surely, we would all like to have His desire fulfilled in ourselves. If we really want His joy, then there is no better portion of God's Word telling of His joy than this Psalm.

No person ever lived who was so dependent on his God and Father as the Lord Jesus. No gospel writer emphasizes this more than Luke. He records the Lord Jesus praying ten times and some of those times were crises. Luke also shows us that it was His habit to pray and seek to please God. Luke, in doing this, contributes to the perfect picture of the perfect sinless humanity of Christ.

It is no wonder that we read in Matthew 27:43, 'He trusted in God' (the fulfillment of Psalm 22:8), written about 1050 BC. The next two verses of Psalm 22 show that the Lord Jesus trusted God more than any other person ever has or can trust God. 'Thou art He that took Me out of the womb: Thou didst make Me hope (or trust) when I was upon My mother's breasts'. Even as a baby on the virgin Mary's breast, He was consciously trusting God. No other baby ever did that! What a precious connection in Psalm 22:10 with this Psalm in v. 1. The trust of the Lord Jesus in His God did not begin at His baptism, it began at His birth! We also see that that trust continued throughout His life and even went through infinite sufferings and abandonment at the cross and He was still trusting God, 'My God, My God...' (Matthew 27:46).

Since the Lord Jesus was impeccable with sinless holy humanity and prayed this prayer, how much more do we need to do so? He was impeccable, unable to sin. We are peccable and prone to sin. We are not only peccable, but we are all capable of a serious moral fall. No matter how long we have gone on for God, no matter how well, we always need to pay heed to the

exhortation of 1 Corinthians 10:12, 'Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall'. That verse indicates that we are most vulnerable when we think we are invulnerable. Jude 24 shows us that if we do fall, it is because we were not looking to Him to keep us from falling.

Between the two chapters in John in which the Lord Jesus speaks of His joy, He tells us in John 16:23-24, 'And in that day ye shall ask Me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My Name, He will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My Name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full'. The Lord Jesus is asking us to have His joy of trust.

His Joy in God (v. 2) 'I have said unto the Lord, Thou art My Lord: I have no good beyond Thee' (RV). He who so fully down here took His place as the dependent, obedient man, can say to God, 'Thou art My Lord'.

Since the Lord Jesus went on to tell us that God was His supreme joy 'I have no good beyond thee', it is no wonder that His life was so absolutely and perfectly devoted to the will of His God. Think of only these three verses: 'My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me' (John 4:34), 'For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me' (John 6:38), Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father' (John 10:17-18). The greatest demonstration of His love for His Father was in His death on the cross.

We, too, should find our supreme joy in God, the highest form of joy (Romans 5:11). Psalm 37:4 is a precious promise: 'Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart'. It could truly be said of the Lord Jesus in Psalm 1:2, 'But His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth He meditate day and night'.

We, too, should delight in God's Word: 'I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food' (Job 23:12); 'I rejoice at Thy Word, as one that findeth great spoil' (Psalm 119:162); and, 'Thy Words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart' (Jeremiah 15:16).

His joy in the Saints (v. 3) 'As for the saints that are in the earth, they are the excellent in whom is all My delight' (RV).

The Church of Rome erroneously makes saints in heaven. Here, however, we read of saints on earth. Since Christ joys in God, He also joys in God's people. 'O Lord our Lord, how excellent is Thy Name in all the earth'. Psalm 8 begins and ends with those words. Here we read about the saints that they are 'the excellent'. It is good for us to see Christ in one another.

In John 17, the Lord Jesus refers to 'those whom Thou hast given Me' 7 times. He is referring primarily to the eleven, but also to us in v. 20. We are the Father's love gift to the Son, and He values us and delights in us. No matter how failing, fainting, or feeble, He says they are the excellent, and His delight is in them (not in their condition, sometimes, but in them) and He wants us to be with Him in eternity (John 17:24).

'Excellent' means "nobles" or "persons of moral excellence". The title "His or Her Excellence" more fittingly applies to the weakest saint than the highest governor! The saints are the aristocracy of heaven, the highest nobility, the Right Honorables. If we think of the saints as we should, they will be our most intimate friends. In Psalm 119:63 we learn that the Psalmist was choosy about his companions, and so should we be.

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The Lord Jesus joyed in the saints, and so should we. John 13:35 will be fulfilled by our joying in one another, 'By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another'. I am thankful that it is still recorded in secular history about first century saints, 'Behold, how they love one another'!

Those of us who speak in ministry should never forget the dignity of the people to whom we are speaking. Moses' failure included calling God's people 'rebels' in Numbers 20:10. This was after being sorely tried for 38 years. But when he was about to leave them, he wrote in Deuteronomy 33:29, 'Who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord'.

We are suitable companions of those who fear God, when we fear God ourselves. 'Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His Name' (Malachi 3:16).

(Continued)

We shouldn't be satisfied to get to heaven, there to meet the Man who we hardly know.

Recognition of the Incarnate Word (John 1:29-34)

Gaius Goff

Just the day after John the Baptist told the Jewish leaders he was not the Messiah but was the voice crying in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord, he saw Jesus coming toward him. There was excitement in his voice as he called on everyone present to look earnestly at the Lord Jesus Christ. Whether John knew the Lord Jesus before His baptism is not recorded, but we know that on this day, Jesus came to John to be publicly identified as the true sacrificial Lamb of God, who fulfilled all the sacrifices made before. John did not say, "Behold your King," nor did he say, "Behold the Mighty Conqueror." Instead, he pointed out the Lord Jesus as the Lamb, chosen by God, approved by God, and now in the flesh. "The Word" was here to be seen and approved by men. Still, even though many saw and heard Him, many did not accept Him.

"The Lamb of God" is a specific sacrificial phrase that the Jews understood clearly. Just as the

Passover lamb's blood was applied to the top and sides of the doors of the Israelites in Egypt, John said the Lamb of God, the divine Lamb, would do this for all humanity. Payment for sin involves the sacrifice of an innocent, perfect Person who gave His blood as an atonement for our souls. That was the purpose, the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ when He came to earth.

He accomplished that mission, and the Holy God accepted His sacrifice, which redeemed the world from sin. This makes it possible for anyone who responds to Him in repentance toward God and puts their faith in Christ to experience forgiveness of sins and salvation from the consequences of sin. As our sacrifice for sin, He puts away sin, cleanses us from all sin by His blood, and bears away the sin of the world so that all can be saved.

"Behold the Lamb of God" is not just a casual glance at the One who approached John at the Jordan River. He appeared much like any other man. The second time, John said that he observed each step He took, and the deliberate steps after His baptism seemed to speak loudly to him. When a person aligns themselves with either a man or a cause, the steps they take, the words they speak, and the destinations they pursue reveal a goal beyond simply pleasing people. Looking carefully at such a person reveals the significance of their testimony.

Any sacrifice I might make needs to be taken seriously when the object of our life is Christ, and it is visible to others. These are more than casual strolls or fleeting words meant to be noticed if those watching see a change from what has been seen before. When those men with John saw Jesus, they changed their course and followed Him to see where He lived.

I wonder if some people who watch me will ask whether others believe I was sent to make a real difference and if my words will reveal the truth. I have had some people, at times, ask why I don't do certain things that others around me do, and they seem to think nothing of it. Maybe if, in some way, they can see Jesus and the joy He brings to me, they will follow Him. That would make the work of my life worthwhile.

John had seen the Spirit of God come and settle on the Lord like a dove after he baptized Jesus. John clarified his role by saying he baptized people with water because of their repentance, but the Lord Jesus Christ would baptize them with the Holy Spirit. This happened on Pentecost, fifty days after the Lord rose from the dead. The Lamb of God was here to take away the sin of the world. He opened the way for all people everywhere to repent and be saved. He was also here to baptize those who believed in Him with the Holy Spirit and to add them to the Body of Christ, which is the Church. John was a humble man who knew who he was and recognized that the Lord Jesus Christ was "before" him in both rank and eternal existence. He now

knew for sure that Jesus was the Son of God. There was now no doubt about who his earthly cousin was.

When we share the Gospel with the world, we must clearly show the listeners that, as sinners by nature, we need a substitute to come to God on our behalf. For generations, symbols and shadows have pointed to the need for a sinless substitute. Lambs, bullocks, goats, pigeons, and doves were all sinless alternatives. Now, the true meaning of these symbols is that Jesus is among us as one of our own, yet sinless because of who He is and how God sent Him.

Born of a virgin, free from Adam's sin nature and in His sinless purity as the Lamb God provided for us, He could eliminate sin forever by bearing it and its consequences on Himself. Through His death, He conquered sin and death. Now, everyone who accepts Him personally benefits from His sacrifice. The price of sin has been paid in full, and each person who approaches Him in faith can receive forgiveness.

The sign of the Holy Spirit was a testimony of God's approval of the Lamb He provided. God had given John evidence that Jesus was from Him, even though John probably knew or had heard about Him. When Jesus was baptized, John was confident that He was the true Messiah because God had told him that the Spirit would remain on Him, and he saw this when the Spirit came, like a dove resting on Jesus. Now, he was sure that Jesus was the Son of God.

Our testimony to people is only effective when the Holy Spirit's work is unhindered. We have been baptized in the Spirit, and when a genuine sense of humility and faith is evident in us, the Spirit of God can work through us and bring blessings to others. John's ministry was short but effective. The length of life on earth isn't a crucial part of our work here. The quality of it is more important than the quantity.

Preachers who are afraid of what people think are usually those who don't fear what God thinks. One fear will cure the other.

"Sin" and "Sins"

F. B. Hole

We have no love for theological hair-splitting, and we shall certainly not be guilty of it in carefully distinguishing between these two things. Though close-

ly connected, there is an important difference between them. Both are mentioned in one verse of Scripture, Romans 5:12. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." "*Sin*" is that which at the fall of Adam gained an entrance into the world. Just as the poison of a snake, once injected into a man's body, will run through his whole system doing its deadly work, so sin - the virus of that old serpent the devil - has permeated man's moral being to his ruin. The result of this is "all have sinned." "Sins," of thought, word, or act, whether of omission or commission, are chargeable to each of us.

"Sin," then, is the root principle, "sins" the shameful fruits that spring therefrom.

This being granted, let us go a step further and ask, what exactly is this "sin" which has entered into the world? 1 John 3:4 answers this point, but, unfortunately, it is one of the verses where our excellent Authorized Version leads us astray. The one Greek word translated by the phrase "transgression of the law" really means "lawlessness," and is so translated in other Versions. The verse, then, should run thus, "Whosoever commits sin practices lawlessness; for *sin is lawlessness*."

There is an immense difference between these two things. "Transgression of the law" is, indeed, the breaking of a clear-cut commandment. There can be no transgression of the law where there is no law to transgress. There was no law in the world from Adam until the days of Moses, hence there was no transgression and sin was not imputed; yet sin was there in awful malignancy, and death its penalty was there. This is just the argument of Romans 5:13-14.

What, then, is lawlessness? It is simply the refusal of all rule, the throwing off all divine restraint. The assertion of man's will in defiance of God's. Sin is just *that*. Such was the course to which Adam committed himself by eating the forbidden fruit. How bitter the results! Instead of being like a planet, shining with steady light, and moving evenly onward in its orbit, controlled by the sun, man has become like a "wandering star," pursuing an erratic course he knows not where; though Scripture significantly says "to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever" (Jude 13).

Instead of being master, he is mastered by the evil thing to which he has yielded himself. Sin has dominion over him and continually breaks out into sins. And, sad to say, it exerts such a deadening and stupefying influence upon the conscience that sinners seem unconscious of their plight apart from the grace of God. When God's grace does act, and the Spirit works in life-giving power in a soul, the first cry is that of need and pain. The past years rise up before it, burdening the conscience. SINS become the question of the hour, and the trouble does not cease until the value of the precious blood of Christ is known and the soul can say, "My sins are forgiven me for His name's sake."

Then, afterwards - this is undoubtedly the experience of most believers - the question of SIN is raised. We discover that though our sins are forgiven, the root principle from which the mischief springs is still within us. What is to be done with that? This is a question indeed. It is something gained if we discern that SIN lies at the root of our troubles. Some Christians seem to be too much occupied with the fruit to consider the root.

Some years ago, a youth approached an elder Christian, complaining that in spite of all his prayers and efforts sins were continually creeping into his life and behavior. SINS!, SINS!, was the burden of his cry. A friend, desiring to help him understand the principles involved asked him, "Upon what tree do apples grow?" "Why, an apple tree," said the astonished youth. The question seemed so ridiculously irrelevant. "And on what tree do plums grow?" "On a plum tree." His astonishment deepened! "And on what tree do sins grow?" was the next question. A pause. Then, with a smile, he said, "On a sin tree, I should think." "You are right, my lad," said this friend. "That's just where they do grow."

Note the point. The sins that we Christians must deplore and confess are not little isolated bits of evil foreign to us, inserted somehow into our lives by the devil. Their cause lies much deeper. They spring as fruit out of that which is within us. Sin is within us. Let no man say otherwise when Scripture says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

What, then, is the remedy for SIN? The answer is, in one word, DEATH. Death, or better still, the resurrection change, which will be the portion of us, who are alive and remain when Jesus comes. It will end sin as far as we are concerned, absolutely and forever. The last trace of its presence in us will then be gone. Every Christian looks *on* in the happy anticipation of that time. Do we all as joyfully look *back* to the hour when death the great remedy came in - the death of Jesus? "In that He died, He died to sin once; but in that He lives, He lives to God" (Romans 6:10).

The matter, therefore, stands thus: He died FOR *our sins*, atoning for them; He died TO *sin*, and therefore taught by the Spirit we recognize that we are identified with our great Representative, and faith appropriates His death as ours. We, too, then, are "dead to sin," and cannot any longer consistently live in it (see Romans 6:2). We therefore reckon ourselves "to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:11). There is just this difference: the sin to which He died was purely an external thing. "In Him is no sin" (1 John 3:5). With us it is not only external, but internal too. Sin is the ruling principle of the world without us; it is also, alas! the ruling principle of the flesh within.

But there is more than this. The death of Christ was not only our death to sin, but it was the total condemnation of the sin to which we died. Romans

8:3 runs, "God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and by a sacrifice for sin [margin] condemned sin in the flesh." At the Cross SIN, in its full hideousness, stood revealed, for lawlessness reached its flood-tide height then; and in that holy sacrifice its judgment was borne, and its condemnation expressed.

Let these distinctions, then, be carefully noted. *Sins* have been borne and their judgment exhausted. *Sin* has been exposed and condemned, and to it we have died in the death of Christ. The Cross was all this and more. What heavenly wonders encircle it! How does it stand alone, unapproached and unapproachable!

We read in John 1:29 of "the sin of the world," and in Romans 8:3 of "sin in the flesh." Is there any difference between these two? And how do you distinguish them from the sins of an individual?

The expression "sin of the world," in John 1, is about as comprehensive as can be. Sin, the root of it, and every offshoot, down to its finest ramifications in the world, is to be taken away by the Lamb of God. His Cross is the basis of it, and He Himself will do it, as foretold in Revelation 19-21.

"Sin in the flesh" is somewhat different. Sin is, of course, the same in essence wherever it is found in the universe of God, whether in demons or men, but as far as this world is concerned "the flesh" - the old fallen nature of the children of Adam - is the great vehicle in which it resides and works, producing sins in individuals universally.

Imagine an immense electric power station. Imagine a whole network of live wires, quite unprotected, radiating in every direction from it all over a vast city. Shocks, consternation, death, would be in every direction! *Sin* is something like the subtle and indefinable electric fluid making its influence felt in every direction. *The flesh* is like the wire, the seat of the electricity, and the vehicle through which it acts. *Sins* are like the shocks dealt out in every direction, resulting in *death*. *The sin of the world* is like the whole concern, wires, electricity, power-station and all! A clean sweep of the hateful thing must be made. Such is the value of the Cross. Well might John say, "Behold the Lamb of God!"

We commonly speak of the forgiveness of sins. Might we not just as correctly speak of the forgiveness of sin?

No; for Scripture does not speak so. Forgiveness of *sins* is found continually in the Bible, forgiveness of a *sin*, too, forgiveness of *sin*, the root principle, *Never!* A simple illustration may help. A mother is greatly tried by her little son, who is rapidly developing a most ungovernable temper. One morning, irritated because his sister is far more interested in her doll than in the motorcar which stands throbbing outside the house, he attempts to make her look at it, and in the struggle brings her

head with a crash against the window, shattering the glass, and severely scratching her face. The boy is sent to his room by his mother, and on his father's return, shortly after, he gets very properly punished. By evening the punishment has had its desired effect. He comes to his parents in tears, confessing his wrong. Seeing that he is thoroughly repentant, they forgive the angry act. But do they forgive the evil temper from which it sprang? By no means. That would be to condone it. No; they strongly condemn it. They lovingly, yet firmly, show him its nature and its consequences, and they seek to lead him to abhor and condemn it as thoroughly as they do. "God ... condemned sin in the flesh." He did not condone nor forgive it; and the work of the Holy Spirit in us leads us to condemn it, even as God has condemned it, to the end that we may know deliverance from its power.

How do you reconcile the condemnation of sin in the flesh with the fact that believers may and do sin?

No reconciliation is needed. *Condemnation* is not *eradication*. The same Bible that speaks of the condemnation of sin (Romans 8:3) also speaks of the fact of sin being still in us (1 John 1:8), and supposes that the believer may sin, in pointing out the divine provision for such a case (1 John 2:1). It even plainly tells us that as a matter of fact we all do sin (James 3:2).

It is God's way to leave the flesh and sin still in the believer, that, practically learning their true nature, he may experimentally come into line with God's condemnation of them at the Cross, and find his life and deliverance in Another, so that he can say, in answer to the cry, "Who shall deliver me?" "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 7:24-25).

Is sin never taken completely out of a believer? It says in 1 John 3:9, "Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin."

At death, when a believer is "absent from the body and present with the Lord," he is done with sin forever. At the Lord's coming all believers will get their glorified bodies without one trace of sin being there. Until then we have the presence of sin in us though it is our privilege to be delivered from its power.

The verse quoted does not in the least conflict with the other Scriptures we have considered. It simply states for us the *nature* of the one born of God. He does not practice sin. ("Practice" rather than "commit" is the real force of the word here). It is not his nature so to do. In so saying the apostle viewed believers in their nature as born of God, without reference to any qualifying feature, which may assert itself in the wear and tear of life.

For instance, a man might walk along the sea-front of some fishing village with a friend, and, pointing to a large net with innumerable cork-floats attached,

say, "What a great boon to the fisherman is a substance like cork, which cannot sink." "Indeed," says his friend, "it can, for only an hour ago I watched the men recovering that very net from the bottom of the sea; the weights attached to the underside were too heavy, and, overcoming the buoyancy of the cork, dragged the whole lot down." Who was right? Both were, allowing for their respective points of view. The former was thinking of the abstract qualities of cork, the latter of a curious and abnormal thing that happened in practice. The apostle John writes from the abstract point of view, and sin in a Christian is certainly not a *normal*, but a most abnormal thing!

Christians, however, do sin all too frequently. Do such sins do away with the settlement reached both as to sin and sins, with which the Christian starts?

No. The cross of Christ is the ground of all.

There... *sin* was condemned. There... atonement was made, so that forgiveness reaches us when we believe. All, too, is the gift of divine grace, and "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Romans 11:29), *i.e.*, they are not subject to a change of mind on God's part. They are forever.

Sins after conversion do, however, greatly upset the Christian's happiness, and dispel the joy both of forgiveness and relationship with God, until in self-judgment such sins are confessed, and through the advocacy of Christ we get the Father's forgiveness (see 1 John 1:9; 2:1). Painful lessons in this way we all have to learn, but there is profit in them. We discover thus the true nature of the flesh within us, and that the only way to keep from gratifying its desire is to "walk in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16).

Did the Lord Jesus Christ in dying bear the sins of everybody? Would that not follow from the fact that He takes away the sin of the world, according to John 1:29?

Scripture puts things thus: "He died for all" (2 Cor. 5:15). "Who gave Himself a ransom for all" (1 Timothy 2:6). "He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). These verses indicate what we may call the Godward aspect of His work. It includes ALL within the wide sweep of its benevolent intention; and propitiation has been made on behalf, not only of believers, but everybody; the whole world.

When we come, not to *intention* or *bearing* of His work, but its actual *results*, we find things put differently. When we view things on the largest possible scale, and "think imperially," in the best sense of the word, John 1:29 does indeed apply, but that is quite in keeping with the fact that sin and all that are eternally identified with it find their part in the lake of fire. If we think of things in detail, we cannot say He bore the sins of everybody, for Scripture says: "Who His own self

bare *our* [*i.e.*, believers'] sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). Hence it is that again we read: "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of *many*" (Hebrews 9:28). Thanks be to God that we find ourselves amongst them!

A humble soul knows that to bless God in prosperity is the way to increase it; and to bless God in adversity is the way to remove it.

Church of God: Organization or Organism?

L. M. Grant

Read Exodus 18.

Exodus 18 has sometimes been used as an argument to justify a practice in the Church of appointing people to certain places of responsibility and dignity so that operations might proceed more smoothly. Does the Spirit of God have any such intention in recording the advice of Jethro, and Moses accepting this advice without question?

There was a friendly spirit between Jethro and his son-in-law, Moses. Jethro had not shared in the afflictions of Israel in their liberation from Egyptian bondage, but coming to visit Moses afterward, he found Moses sitting from morning to night to hear the causes of Israelites and to pass judgment for them. It was a most plausible alternative he suggested, one that appeals favorably to our natural thoughts. But notice that Jethro said, "I will give you counsel, and God will be with you" (v. 19). He did not suggest that God should give Moses counsel, but implied that God would be with Moses if Moses accepted Jethro's counsel. He advised Moses to appoint able and conscientious men to judge the smaller matters that arose between the people, and who could bring the larger matters to Moses.

Moses evidently considered that this was perfectly logical, and who could quarrel with this? But one fatal flaw was evident in adopting this advice. God had not commanded it, and Moses did not even consult God about this matter. Jethro could give the advice, then leave. He had not been linked with Israel in their former afflictions, and he was not to be linked with them in their wilderness trials. Moses chose "to suffer affliction with the people of God" (Hebrews 11:25), but Jethro did not.

If God intended Moses to act as he was doing, could He not give him strength for it? Certainly, He could. But this history illustrates something most serious. Moses is a type of Christ. Should believers be content to have other people settle the problems they consider small, and only bring the great things to the Lord? No! We should go directly to the Lord with every occasion of need. The introduction of intermediaries is the legal principle of human organization. No wonder we find God introducing the law of Moses in Exodus 19, and God Himself putting Israel under a form of organization that Peter later spoke of as "a yoke — which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" (Acts 15:10).

But even among Christians the natural tendency of our hearts is to revert to legal bondage in some way, and we fail to realize that human organization in the Church of God is legal bondage. Where some people are put in special places, then others do not need the spiritual exercise of being in the Lord's presence to receive guidance, for they get their guidance from human resources.

The body of Christ, the Church, is not an organization, but an organism, that which is vitally connected with the Head of the body and which receives its nourishment, guidance and direction from the Head (Ephesians 4:15-16). When first instituted after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the Church had no human head on earth, such as Moses. Apostles were present, not as being authorities themselves, but as unitedly insisting on the sole authority of the Lord Jesus. When some Jewish believers came to Antioch and insisted that Gentile believers should be circumcised and keep the law, this was settled at Jerusalem, not by the authority of any apostle, but by the word of God (Acts 15:7-8; 17-18), which was declared by the apostles and accepted by the gathered brethren.

It was necessary to have apostles as the connecting link between the dispensation of law and that of the grace of God, necessary that such men of devoted character should be used to lay the foundation of Christianity (1 Corinthians 3:10-11; Ephesians 2:20), that is, to lay down the truth of God concerning Christ in all His relationships. Apostles themselves passed away, but they have left their writings, scriptures that are authoritative, and by which the Church of God may be guided and preserved in all her subsequent history. While they were living, apostles did appoint elders in various assemblies, and Paul instructed Titus to appoint elders in each assembly in Crete (Titus 1:5). Assemblies never did appoint elders, and there are no apostles living to do so now, nor delegates of the apostles.

However, once the Church has been established, there is no reason why believers should not be unitedly guided by the Spirit of God, who remains as a living power in the Church, as was not true under the dispensation of law. Are there to be no elders therefore? By all means, elders are still in the Church, but

not as appointed by men. There are those who can do the work without any appointment, for God has fitted them for the work. We should certainly pray for such and appreciate their wise counsel and help.

As regards ministry of the word of God, God Himself gives gifts who are to respond to His own leading in devoted service. They do not need the appointment of men, but the power of God. If the assembly sees a spiritual gift in a saint, they should gladly encourage him. With the Spirit of God leading, there will be humility and unity. The assembly will gladly express fellowship with such a servant in the measure in which they can approve of his service.

In all spiritual service, we are therefore to depend, not in any way upon human arrangements, but upon the power of the Spirit of God. On the other hand, in Acts 6:3 the saints at Jerusalem were told to look out from among themselves seven men of good reputation to take care of material needs among the saints. These are the deacons of which 1 Timothy 3:8-13 speaks. As to caring for material things, the assembly is perfectly right to appoint those whom they can trust to do this work.

But God does not allow us to choose for ourselves the ministers of spiritual things whom we desire. How good it is that God cares for us so perfectly! Yet we respond so little to this that when difficulties arise, we look all around us for some human means of meeting these. Such means will be appealing to our rationalizing minds, things that have been adopted by many groups of Christians but leaving out the clear leading of God by His Spirit. How humbling it is that we are thus expressing the opinion that Christ is not enough!

It is natural to desire a thriving testimony, but if such a testimony becomes the object, then Christ has lost His place as the one Object worthy of our confidence. Let us return to our first love, and value the living power of the Spirit in the body of Christ.

God does not give the Christian power to overcome sin. If He did, you would surely be self-righteous, proud, and self-sufficient. God comes into you and overcomes sin as you yield to Him.
Alva McClain

Truth: Relative, Situational, or Real?

Jim Brown

In a day of ever-increasing default toward adapting a myriad of possible angles of subjectivity to all subjects, the iron-clad reality of the Bible's absolute truth is rapidly being shelved. Those reading this article,

for instance, would all agree that Matthew 7:14's "strait gate" and "narrow way" refer first to one's true conversion to Christ, and then, the consecrated life to follow. The world takes pleasure in mocking these two irrefutable truths by attaching the label to those walking the narrow way as meaning they are "narrow-minded", hence, both intolerant of the world and intolerable to the world. In a sense, they're right, but only as it satisfies their reluctance to likewise enter and walk. Notice the title above refers to three distinct possibilities regarding truth. I will attempt to treat each one briefly and fairly, saving the best for last, of course.

First, Relative Truth.

In John 18:38, Pilate asked the Lord, "What is Truth?", hinting at the very source whereby God's truth became somehow ambiguous to Adam and Eve in the garden. His dark question implies that real, absolute truth cannot possibly be known, at least as far as he knew. Pilate, by this admission, tells us that he did not know God, therefore, whether by Roman law or by any other means, ascertaining truth was akin to clawing oneself out of the inside of a tall silo coated with a foot of ice. Why even try, right? Against what standard could Pilate measure the correctness or validity of anything done or stated? I believe the very ancient Romans, long before Pilate's day, may have "known God but they chose not to glorify God, professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1: 21-22). During his time, before and after, there have been many well-known Greek and Roman philosophers' humanistic theories with their whimsical, mystical magic carpet rides, toying with, and mocking God's truth. There were also religious leaders who, in pretense, were circumventing truth while claiming to be the sole adherents to it and teachers of it. But they, like some who Paul describes in 2 Timothy 3:7, those who will ignite and perpetuate the church's growing apostasy, were "ever learning but never coming to the knowledge of the truth". Every idea, within the realm of trying to define proper guidance in human affairs, not guided by the Spirit of God, according to the Word of God, was destined only to be a lie disguised as truth, relative to other lies engaged in the same evil work of poisoning their listeners by undermining God's Real Truth (John 14:6). They, no doubt, compared themselves with each other and maligned others, each believing they had the best handle on truth, but in reality...relative to what? "They measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves are not wise" (2 Corinthians 10:12). Something may seem right (Proverbs 14:12) but again, related to what? Only to each other.

Next, Situational Truth.

The Pharisees in John 8 were in full denial of every true statement the Lord made in this conversation with

them. The gospel accounts reveal these men proved to be the consummate proponents of what is known as “the chameleon complex”, sometimes, the color of Abraham, at other times, the color of Moses and the law. In John 8:33, it seemed convenient for them to boast about being Abraham’s seed. It gets worse. Not only did they claim to be legitimate through Abraham, but their accusation in verse 41 implies that our Lord was begotten from an illegitimate relationship. What mercy and grace the Lord showed them! In this situation, even though ignoring the fact they were clearly not Abraham’s seed spiritually (Romans 2:28-29), they cited him as their claim to legitimate truth as the situation seemed to present itself best in their favor to win this specific argument. The other tactic used by the scribes, chief priests and Pharisees to defend their position was to make their boast in the law of Moses. One need only to read the Lord’s scathing indictment against them in Matthew 23 as to the consistent hypocrisy they displayed as teachers of, but not doers of the weightier matters of the law named as “judgment, mercy and faith” in verse 23. He called them ‘vipers’! A word to the wise is this: We should never let the situation we find ourselves in cause us to shift away from a right understanding of truth in order to appear gracious, accommodating or negotiating when it comes to absolute truth. Sadly, this does happen in the business world and in general life, but ultimately, it is nothing more than an insincere attempt to please all the people all the time while incurring the displeasure of our God. When it comes to truth, God is not flexible. After all, absolute truth is His divine standard. And we are to be “no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Ephesians 4:14).

Finally, Real Truth.

To study, digest, enjoy and promote the truth of God is the privilege and responsibility of every believer in Christ, not just assembly elders or itinerate preachers and Bible scholars. Avoiding those tricky pitfalls of both relative and situational truth, [the very touchstones that keep the world system going under the wickedly controlling auspices of its god (2 Corinthians 4:4a)], is only part of the whole of our responsibility to Christ. To assimilate God’s truth into our memory, there is no substitute for the diligent pursuit of it in His Word. In order to lay hold upon that which is profitable in every sense of the word, is the very means by which we will effectively be able to thwart the unending onslaught of Satan’s plausible lies that appeal to the natural mind, that flesh that still resides in us. Thankfully, we understand spiritual things because we are born of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10-13). Can we count on what is written in Scripture? Every word of it? When this comes into question, one of the first passages that comes to

mind is 2 Timothy 3:16-17; however, there are many other verses that point to the integrity of God and His faithfulness. That’s where our absolute assurance comes from. “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” (Numbers 23:19). “Every word of God is pure” (Proverbs 30:5). There is “no variableness, neither shadow of turning with Him” (James 1:17). He “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2). In fact, “...it was impossible for God to lie” (Hebrews 6:18-19). Why? “So that we might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us; which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast...”.

Unlike Pilate, we have an absolute standard, our Bible and its Great Author, by which everything is judged, while shunning unsatisfying humanistic relativity and subjectivity as plausible alternates. And unlike the shifty Jewish religious leaders of John 8 and Matthew 23, we are the happy possessors of a real hope based on real truth; a truth not contrived, perverted, nor fabricated to dress ourselves up to appear spiritual, while unmoved in heart. Hearty adherence to the truth of God makes all the difference. The world has no anchor. It will keep marching on to the beat of its own relative and situational ethics with self-satisfied conclusions. In the meanwhile, we, like Jacob, can be thankful to God for “all the mercies and truth” (Genesis 32:10) He has shown to us, for which we’re not worthy, yet we can still enjoy them every day.

The truths that I know best I have learned on my knees. I never know a thing well, till it is burned into my heart by prayer.”

John Bunyon

The Old Cross and the New

from “Man - The Dwelling Place of God”

A. W. Tozer

All unannounced and mostly undetected, there has come in modern times a new cross into popular evangelical circles. It is like the old cross, but different: the likenesses are superficial; the differences, fundamental.

From this new cross has sprung a new philosophy of the Christian life, and from that new philosophy has come a new evangelical technique—a new type of meeting and a new kind of preaching. This new evangelism employs the same language as the old, but its content is not the same and its emphasis not as before.

The old cross would have no truck with the world. For Adam's proud flesh it meant the end of the journey. It carried into effect the sentence imposed by the law of Sinai. The new cross is not opposed to the human race; rather, it is a friendly pal and, if understood aright, it is the source of oceans of good clean fun and innocent enjoyment. It lets Adam live without interference. His life motivation is unchanged; he still lives for his own pleasure, only now he takes delight in singing choruses and watching religious movies instead of singing bawdy songs and drinking hard liquor. The accent is still on enjoyment, though the fun is now on a higher plane morally if not intellectually.

The new cross encourages a new and entirely different evangelistic approach. The evangelist does not demand abnegation of the old life before a new life can be received. He preaches not contrasts but similarities. He seeks to key into public interest by showing that Christianity makes no unpleasant demands; rather, it offers the same thing the world does, only on a higher level. Whatever the sin-mad world happens to be clamoring after at the moment is cleverly shown to be the very thing the gospel offers, only the religious product is better.

The new cross does not slay the sinner, it redirects him. It gears him into a cleaner and a jollier way of living and saves his self-respect. To the self-assertive it says, "Come and assert yourself for Christ." To the egotist it says, "Come and do your boasting in the Lord." To the thrill-seeker it says, "Come and enjoy the thrill of Christian fellowship." The Christian message is slanted in the direction of the current vogue in order to make it acceptable to the public.

The philosophy back of this kind of thing may be sincere but its sincerity does not save it from being false. It is false because it is blind. It misses completely the whole meaning of the cross.

The old cross is a symbol of death. It stands for the abrupt, violent end of a human being. The man in Roman times who took up his cross and started down the road had already said good-bye to his friends. He was not coming back. He was going out to have it ended. The cross made no compromise, modified nothing, spared nothing; it slew all of the man, completely and for good. It did not try to keep on good terms with its victim. It struck cruel and hard, and when it had finished its work, the man was no more.

The race of Adam is under death sentence. There is no commutation and no escape. God cannot approve any of the fruits of sin, however innocent they

may appear or beautiful to the eyes of men. God salvages the individual by liquidating him and then raising him again to newness of life.

That evangelism which draws friendly parallels between the ways of God and the ways of men is false to the Bible and cruel to the souls of its hearers. The faith of Christ does not parallel the world, it intersects it. In coming to Christ we do not bring our old life up onto a higher plane; we leave it at the cross. The corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die.

We who preach the gospel must not think of ourselves as public relations agents sent to establish good will between Christ and the world. We must not imagine ourselves commissioned to make Christ acceptable to big business, the press, the world of sports or modern education. We are not diplomats but prophets, and our message is not a compromise but an ultimatum.

God offers life, but not an improved old life. The life He offers is life out of death. It stands always on the far side of the cross. Whoever would possess it must pass under the rod. He must repudiate himself and concur in God's just sentence against him.

What does this mean to the individual, the condemned man who would find life in Christ Jesus? How can this theology be translated into life? Simply, he must repent and believe. He must forsake his sins and then go on to forsake himself. Let him cover nothing, defend nothing, excuse nothing. Let him not seek to make terms with God, but let him bow his head before the stroke of God's stern displeasure and acknowledge himself worthy to die.

Having done this let him gaze with simple trust upon the risen Saviour, and from Him will come life and rebirth and cleansing and power. The cross that ended the earthly life of Jesus now puts an end to the sinner; and the power that raised Christ from the dead now raises him to a new life along with Christ.

To any who may object to this or count it merely a narrow and private view of truth, let me say God has set His hallmark of approval upon this message from Paul's day to the present. Whether stated in these exact words or not, this has been the content of all preaching that has brought life and power to the world through the centuries. The mystics, the reformers, the revivalists have put their emphasis here, and signs and wonders and mighty operations of the Holy Ghost gave witness to God's approval.

Dare we, the heirs of such a legacy of power, tamper with the truth? Dare we with our stubby pencils erase the lines of the blueprint or alter the pattern shown us in the Mount? May God forbid. Let us preach the old cross and we will know the old power.