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Men of God: Noah

"Noah Found Grace in the Eyes of the Lord"

"Noah walked with God"

(Genesis 6:9)

Alan Davidson

The earth was filled with violence, corruption and moral degeneracy and fast heading for utter destruction. This is not a statement about conditions in the modern world, but it is a summary of the "days" in this world about four thousand five hundred years ago. The Lord said, "As it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man" (Luke 17:26). The ancient "days of Noah" and the present "days" before the Lord's coming again are just the same. What should we, as believers, do in such "days"? Should we try to improve or circumvent the conditions? Should our voices be heard in world forums for change? Should we vote for those who claim to seek global betterment? Should we try to stir a sense of urgency in an apathetic society with 'left behind' films? What did Noah do? He was a righteous man who witnessed for God in dark "days". He lived in separation from the unrighteous, violence and corruption of his generation. "Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:9).

In the Days of Noah:

1. The Will of God was Defied

"God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Genesis 1:27-28). "The LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth" (Genesis 6:7).

Creation, springing from God's hand was perfect. Eden's garden surpassed improvement. Our first parents were pure in innocence, the unsullied reflection of God's own image. "Yea, hath God said?" (Genesis 3:1). The devil attacked; sin entered into the world, into the heart of man and into that first family. Jealousy, envy, malice and rage filled the heart of Cain. The blow is aimed and Abel

is murdered; bringing violence, sorrow, curse and death upon the earth. The book of Genesis is about two seeds and two families. The first; chapter 1 to chapter 11, developed in violence and corruption until God brought it to an end in the flood of waters. "And God said unto Noah, the end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth" (Genesis 6:13). God does not "repent" of His purposes. God's first thoughts are God's final thought. God changed His method of dealing with mankind. Noah and his family were placed on a new earth in a new covenant. "And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Genesis 9:1). The changes of God's ways from innocence to promise, to law, to grace, are for His glory in His all wise program with mankind.

2. The Work of God was Corrupted

"And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31).

"The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth" (Genesis 6:11-12).

The wisdom, love and power of God, manifest in the magnificence of a full working creation brought satisfaction and glory to God Himself. The brilliance of light unclouded, the beauty of that Paradise unblemished, the fragrance and fullness of its verdant pastures was to be the scene of communion between God and His creature. Eden's sun was eclipsed. Darkness descended upon the brightness. The flowers of the garden became distant memories as man was driven out. The thorns and thistles, sorrow and sweat, distance and death have marked the generations of Adam since sin entered into this world. In the days of Noah, evil had come to a head as the population increased. Man's corruption before God and his violence to his fellow man had reached a zenith so that judgement had become necessary. "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). In the modern age, the media through modern communications fill the mind, thoughts and imaginations of mankind. Life has become a soap opera. Man's imagination is focused upon actors, film stars, amusement and sport. On the screen is fiction, but on the streets of cities on earth, violence and murder is a reality in a brain washed society. Lies, deception, horror and moral corruption blind the minds of those who believe not. Global humanity, without shame as man-slayers and whoremongers have become beastly and "fierce" (2 Timothy 3:3). The violence of "the beast", the falsehood of "the false prophet" (Revelation 13); and the

corruption of the "scarlet woman" (Revelation 17) will bring the wrath of God upon this earth, not by flood but by fire (Revelation 18,19). What did Noah do in his day? "Noah was a just man and perfect in his generation" (Genesis 6:9).

3. The Warnings from God were in Vain

"The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2).

"And the LORD said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh, yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years" (Genesis 6:3).

When earth was formless and void the Spirit of God moved to bring form and fullness to the firmament. "By His Spirit He hath garnished the heavens" (Job 26:13). God communed with His creation in the cool breeze in the evening of the day.

When God's Sabbath of rest was disturbed by sin, He graciously covered the shameful state of Adam

and Eve, with coats of skin. A widening span developed between the holiness of God and rebellious man. Yet, God provided a way back as by Abel's offering of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. The generations increased in wickedness and defiance. The Spirit strove with man before the flood. God gave loud testimony; He raised up witnesses to send forth the thrilling note of truth. He sent preachers to warn and call to repentance. In the seventh generation, Enoch's trumpet did not give an uncertain sound. Such was the burden of God's servant that even the name he gave to his son, Methuselah, warned that judgement was coming to the old world. "His days shall be an hundred and twenty years" (Genesis 6:3). This is respite. Here is space to repent, to turn, to pray for forgiveness. Like Nineveh, had they repented the judgement might at least have been delayed. What did Noah do?

"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Hebrews 11:7). This verse begins and ends with the word "faith". "Faith is ... the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Faith believes the Word and Warnings of God. "Faith cometh by hearing" (Romans 10:17). In the days of Noah, no rain had ever been seen. No evidence was given other than God's Word. "Fear" – "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7). The Ark was proof of Noah's faith, as he "prepared"; each nail, each plank was a witness and condemnation to the world. Noah was marked by fear, faith, work, labor, patience and preaching. "Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5). The people did not hear an invitation to enter into the ark. It is ridiculous to preach that, large though it was, there was room in the ark for the whole population of earth. The people were "disobedient" (1 Peter 3:20), occupied with pleasure and social things; they had no interest. They heard a call to repent of their evil ways from the preacher of righteousness. Noah was 500 years old when God first spoke to him (Genesis 5:32). Noah was 600 years old when the flood came (Genesis 7:6). The ark was "a preparing" for 100 years. Noah witnessed and worked in the power of the Spirit yet only eight souls were saved. The rest perished in the flood and are presently in the prison of perishing spirits in hell (1 Peter 3:19).

There are two voices in the world today. One is the lives of God's people and lips that preach repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21). The only power holding back the evil at the end of the Day of Grace, is that of the Holy Spirit; "He who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way" (2 Thessalonians 2:7), and the presence of believers "what withholdeth" (2 Thessalonians 2:6). God is long-suffering. We are still in this world to be shining as lights in the darkness, our lives to be as salt amid corruption.

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4. The Wrath of God was Imminent

"But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:37).

"The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah" (1 Peter 3:20).

The days of Noah are mentioned by four writers in the New Testament, Matthew, Luke, Peter and the writer to the Hebrews. The first reference in the N.T. is by the Lord Himself. It is interesting that the Lord did not mention the wickedness but the carelessness and wilful ignorance of the people. "For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:38-39). Life went on as normal, buying and selling, planting and building. The people planned on staying. Noah was building an ark; he was leaving.

The mass of the people today are marked by complete denial of the claims of God, a total lack of repentance and no discernment of the times. Their chief interests are pleasure, sport, hospitality, social enjoyment and entertainment in spite of God's warnings of imminent events. In Revelation the masses of earth are described as "earth dwellers"; they do not just live on earth but they are characteristically "earth dwellers"; living as though this materialistic, fleshly life will continue forever, wilfully ignorant of impending doom. Even the Rapture of the Church, when we shall go in and the door shall be shut, will not alter the attitude of the world at large, as they live only for time and earth.

Today, before the Rapture, the only explanation why we, who are alive and remain, are here on earth is God's longsuffering. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some even count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Noah preached for 100 years. "He condemned the world" (Hebrews 11:7). He prepared the ark, "wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water" (1 Peter 3:21). It was of the mercy of God toward Noah that when the great deep was broken up and the windows of heaven were opened, that his three sons were safe in the ark. The triumphs of the Gospel of Christ reached the descendants of Ham, Shem and Japheth in Acts chapters 8, 9 and 10. The Ethiopian, Saul of Tarsus and Cornelius, identified with Christ in the waters of baptism.

What Did Noah Do?

"But, (lovely word) Noah found Grace in the eyes of the LORD" (Genesis 6:8).

How did Noah react to these "days"? How did Noah live? What did he do? What should we as believers do in these, "Last days" (2 Timothy 3:1)?

God is not looking for great men. God is seeking men and women who have learned to lean upon a Great God. Like ourselves, the story of Noah began with,

"Grace". "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Romans 5:20). "By grace are ye saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). We can identify as we sing: "Amazing Grace". "These are the generations of Noah" (Genesis 6:9). In his own day and generation, among his fellow men, Noah by his life and testimony; "condemned the world" (Hebrews 11:7). He was separated, different, a contrast to the world. The Lord said concerning His own; "The world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14). "Noah was a just man" (Genesis 6:9). Noah was the first man in the Bible to bear this noble title, "just" (righteous). He "became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Hebrews 11:7). With faith in his heart and uprightness in his life amid abounding wickedness, he preached righteousness loudly by his deeds. "And perfect (unblemished) in his generations" (Genesis 6:9). He was perfect amid wickedness, unblemished amid abhorrent evil, blameless surrounded by violence. Amid sneers, mockery and ridicule, Noah obeyed God. He built a ship so vast, without rudder, without sail, designed to float, constructed on dry land and as yet it had never rained. Animals, male and female, small and large, fierce and tame, were to live in peace inside the ark, while humans outside murdered each other.

"And Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:9). In holy separation from the evils of his day, he conducted himself with habitual communion with God. To walk with God is the secret of blessing. To walk with God we must know the will, word and ways of God. "Walk worthy" (Ephesians 4:1); "walk not as other Gentiles walk" (Ephesians 4:17); "walk in love" (Ephesians 5:2); "walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8); "walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise" (Ephesians 5:15). Faith will triumph, unbelief will perish. With anguish, the antediluvians saw the ark rise peacefully above the billows. The preacher of righteousness opened his window heavenward upon the mountains of Ararat, to receive the dove, "in her mouth was an olive leaf plucked off" (Genesis 8:11).

Noah was a faithful preacher, a careful builder, a family man, a spiritual man knowing (before Leviticus chapter 11 was written), the difference between clean and unclean animals. Noah was a priestly man; the first man that we read about specifically who built an altar, spontaneously without command (Genesis 8:20). "He planted a vineyard: And he drank of the wine, and was drunken" (Genesis 9:21). Noah, after a long life of saintly eminence, affords a sad occasion as he lies in drunkenness. Beneath his habitual outward piety, lay a fallen Adamic nature, a lesson to us all. Like Adam, he partook of the fruit of the tree, in Noah's case, the vine. The result, like his fore parent, was nakedness. Adam's sin brought in the curse upon the whole human family. Noah's sin brought a curse upon one third of his family. Few believers reach heaven without some storm of

failure and reproach. The failures of great men are faithfully recorded in Scripture, to teach us our vulnerability to the world, the flesh and the devil.

There was only One Who lived on this earth Who was absolutely perfect. He passed through the deep waters for us at Calvary. "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy waterspouts: all Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over Me" (Psalm 42:7). He took our place to provide for us a Shelter and Salvation from the storms of God's wrath against our sin. He has passed through and out of the deep waters of death; through deaths dark angry billows, up to the Throne of God. He is the Guarantor of the Covenant. "I do set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth" (Genesis 9:13). Soon, we shall see Him on that rainbow circled Throne, (Revelation 4:3). 'The days of the Son of Man', will be when He is in control of the earth. His Name is called, "Jesus Christ the Righteous" (1 John 2:1).

Conversion and Baptism

David McKinley

I have heard it stated publicly on a number of occasions that baptism is always linked with conversion and not with assembly fellowship. We wish to examine what the scriptures say and decide what the proper spiritual action should be when a person requests baptism. Clearly the New Testament preachers included the teaching of baptism in their preaching. The Scriptures are clear that all genuine believers in our Lord Jesus Christ should be baptized. The desire to submit to the Lord's will should be evident as soon as a profession of faith in Christ is made.

In areas where there is no established assembly work, it is doubtless the responsibility of the evangelist to teach and carry out the rite of baptism for those who are saved through his ministry. His objective is not only to see souls saved from Hell, but to see a "people prepared for the Lord" who will eventually be gathered on simple scriptural grounds as a testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Where gospel work associated with an established scriptural assembly of Christians gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, results (as it should,) in the conversion of sinners, it is the responsibility of local elders to consider the request for baptism, of those who profess salvation. As the "next step" of obedience to the Lord, after baptism, is assembly fellowship, those elders need to be satisfied that those whom they decide to baptize, are (a) genuinely saved people and (b) are suitable candidates for reception to the local testimony as far as testimony in the world is concerned. There should be no excuses made such as "Well, we are not considering the candidate for assembly fellowship at this

stage, so we will take a chance on baptizing them and hope it will encourage them to go on better." Baptism is not a rite to "encourage" anyone. It is a step of obedience to the Lord that no genuine child of God should balk at, but for a false professor it only helps confirm them in a false position. Spiritually it does them no good and, physically, it only succeeds in wetting them! Let us examine some of the prominent scriptures bearing on baptism:-

"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach ("make disciples of", T. Newberry margin) all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the World (age TN)." (Matthew 28:18-20). The Lord Jesus in resurrection power, commissioned the apostles to spread the glad news of His saving work into every corner of the world and by His accompanying power, see people become His disciples, manifesting that faith by obedience to baptism and to all things he had commanded. The lesson here is that the preacher is to not only preach to see conversions, but teach all things to produce conformity to God's word. Baptism is in association with the Triune God.

"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:15-16). This command to the disciples, links baptism with faith. Where true faith exists then true obedience will be the visible evidence of the invisible faith. "Faith without works is dead" says James 2:26. A profession of faith accompanied with a refusal to bow to the Lord's will gives no evidence of salvation and he that hasn't true faith, (i.e. "that believeth not"), will perish, even should such have been baptized. The lesson here is that the convert should be willing to submit to the Lord.

"Save yourselves from this untoward (perverse) generation'. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized." (Acts 2:41). Here was a Jewish audience, part of a nation that had just rejected and crucified their Messiah, who were convicted of their sin and had cried out "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter's command to them was "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost". By gladly receiving the word and being baptized they were taking sides with Christ against their own nation that had crucified Him. This was something so radical and revolutionary that it was very unlikely that anyone who doubted the reality of a risen Christ would have dared to submit to the ordinance of baptism. By so doing they were "saving themselves" or standing absolutely clear, from a generation of rank unbelievers. This is in stark contrast to the situation of a young person today whose parents and maybe grandparents are assembly members and who may have professed salvation in an environment where many of their closest friends will rejoice at their profes-

sion. There may have been subsequent pressure from family members to “get baptized”. In such circumstances there is no great “cost” of standing apart from family or national ties and so it is incumbent on those who interview such a person to be convinced that the candidate is a genuinely saved soul, indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. The lesson here is that there should be clear evidence of a heart change wrought by the indwelling Holy Spirit, in regard to the past, be it attitude, attractions, actions or associations. There must be some evidence of a definite change.

“But when they believed Philip, preaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” (Acts 8:12) Philip preaching in Samaria, a stronghold of satanic power, saw a great work done and the converts were baptized, but note that it was adults that were baptized – not children! The words used in Greek indicate mature people, at least those who have grown up out of childhood. Here also is the first case of a mistake made in baptizing an unconverted man. No hint of blame is levied on Philip, but the Apostle Peter with his apostolic gifts and authority withstood Simon the sorcerer, declaring “thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:23) In a work of God when much genuine fruit is seen, there needs to be increased vigilance, lest the Evil one tries to spoil the work by “sowing tares”. The lesson here is that immature children are not candidates for baptism and care should be taken that no ulterior motives are involved. Also note that baptism is under the authority of Jesus Christ.

“Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore, we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4) The doctrine of baptism reveals to us that upon believing the gospel, in God’s reckoning we died with Christ, were buried with him and are raised with him in a new kind of life. A candidate for baptism must therefore be seen as showing evidence of mortification of old habits and ungodly practices and producing some signs of “newness of life” in Christ. As it would be cruel and unlawful to bury a person who is not already dead, so it is tragic to make a mistake and baptize one who is still alive to the world and to sin. The lesson here is that it may take some time for elders to discern if the evidence of new life is being manifested.

As Mr. Wm. Hoste so ably put it:-

Back to the cross, I look and wondering see
The Christ of God there crucified for me.
But gazing closer at that form divine,
I see with Him, myself: His death was mine.

Again, beside the garden tomb I stand
And watch Him buried there with reverent hand.
But in that grave faith sees not one, but two.

God hid me there forever from his view.

But was that precious “corn of wheat” thus sown
In tears, wasted or did it rise alone?
A fruitful ear, bursting from ‘neath the sod,
It rose, its every grain a saint of God.

Since then, by simple faith ourselves we see,
Whether for Christ in death or life to be;
May the world henceforth in our words and ways,
See Christ in us, to His continual praise.

William Hoste. (1906)

In summary, it is recognized that there may be areas of this world where due to “winnowing” effects of intense persecution, converts may be baptized quite soon after conversion. However, in light of the above scriptures it is clear that in this Western world, with so much spurious Christian profession, godly care and discernment must be exercised when considering candidates for baptism. In particular:-

1. There must be a genuine desire to obey the Lord.
2. There must be evidence of a changed attitude to the past life. (e.g. If a person had done wrong to others before conversion, have they repented of it and made it right by confession and restitution if need be?)
3. There must be time given for growing-up in the case of childhood professions.
4. There must be care taken to discern if there could be any ulterior motives involved in the candidate who is asking for baptism. (e.g. If a person only seeks baptism after forming a friendship with someone already baptized or already in assembly fellowship, it should be a cause for serious inquiry and concern.)
5. There must be some evidence of the Holy Spirit producing fruit of new life in Christ.

May the Lord of the assemblies continue to raise up God-fearing evangelists who will preach the sound, soul-searching gospel which will produce genuine conversions to God. May He also raise up spiritually minded overseers who will have the discernment and care to recognize those who are genuinely born of God. Such men will be glad to baptize those who are dead to the world and alive unto Christ, providing reinforcements for the support and spread of assembly testimony in these last days.

“Be of Good Cheer”

G. C. Willis

“Hidden Treasures found in the Greek New Testament”

The Spirit of God tells us that “in the last days perilous times shall come.” (2 Timothy 3:1). The word translated perilous is *chalepos*, and the dictionary

gives the meaning as: “hard; hard to do, or deal with; difficult; hard to bear; painful; grievous; harsh; fierce; savage..” Does not this word very accurately describe the condition of our present day? As we look around us, we might well be discouraged, cast down, filled with fears and forebodings.

But if one little Greek word can so accurately describe the spirit of the present day, there is another little Greek word that can heal the wounds of fear and sorrow and discouragement caused by all that is about us. That little word is ‘tharseo’, or, as our Lord loved to use it, ‘tharsei’ (second person, singular, imperative). He used it time and again when He was on earth, both to man and woman; and He used it once again after His return to the Father in the glory. Eight times we find it in the Greek New Testament (including the doubtful reading of Luke 8:48). We find it in every Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles; and if I mistake not, He whispers it to His tried saints even in the present day. Sure I am that you and I may take it for ourselves.

My father often had to use a seal in his work, and he loved this word so much that he had the Greek letters of it engraved on the seal he always used, so that he might ever be reminded of its message. As a little child, I loved to watch the hot, red, sealing wax as he sealed his important letters; and when a little older, loved to trace out the strange Greek letters, which he told me meant

“Cheer Up”

So this word was my introduction to the Greek New Testament. Do you wonder that I loved it?

The word has been translated “be of good cheer!” or, “be of good comfort,” as we generally find it in the Authorized Version of our Bible. But others prefer, “Be of good courage”, or “Be confident” or “Take heart!”, or, (as I love it best), “Cheer up!”. But it has the meaning of all these.

The first time we find it in the New Testament is in Matthew 9:2, where He says to the man sick of the palsy, “Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.” We find it next in the 22nd verse of the same chapter. He is using it here to a woman, and that is not by accident. The Lord would have us each, man or woman, girl or boy, learn this word for our very own selves. Here He says, “Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole.”

We find it for the third time in this same gospel. (I think Matthew loved this word). See chapter 14:27. It was a dark, storm night, and the disciples were far out on the sea, and the wind was contrary, and for hours they had been battling with wind and waves. It is at such a time that this word sounds the sweetest. The disciples were toiling in rowing. They were alone, without their Lord in the boat. But unknown to them, He had been watching them in their toil and fear, though they had no idea He was doing so. Then they saw a strange sight.

Someone was walking on the water and coming near to them. They were troubled and cried out with fear. So would you and I, had we been in their place. Then, straightway, Jesus spoke to them. What did He say? “Tharseite!” “Cheer Up!” It is I; be not afraid.” Or, as the old Wycliff translation so beautifully puts it: “I am, nyl ye dread.”

We find it for the fourth time in the same story, this time told by Mark in Mark 6:50. We find it next in Mark 10:49 to the blind beggar Bartimaeus, when he cried to the Lord for mercy and Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called; and “they call the blind man, saying unto him: ‘Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee.’” This is the only time in the New Testament when this word is not spoken by the Lord Himself, but used in directing a needy one to Him.

Then we find it in Luke 8:48; but this time the reading is doubtful. It is the same story we saw in Matthew 9:22.

John 16:33 is the last recorded time our Lord uses it on earth, and it seems to be strangely wonderfully fitted as a parting message to us all, as He prepared to leave this world and return to His Father. “In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” What a comfort for us today! So, Be of good comfort! Be of good cheer! Cheer up! The Lord says it: “I have overcome the world!” This is His message to you, to me, today.

The last time we hear it in the New Testament is in Acts 23:11. Paul had used a rather clever device of his own to divide the Jewish council, setting the Pharisees and Sadducees against each other. In Acts 24:21 he seems to confess that he had been wrong in doing this. We can well suppose that the night following, lying there in the Roman prison, too sad and discouraged to sleep, Paul was deeply regretting what he felt had been a dishonor to the worthy Name by which he was called. Then the Lord Himself comes and stands by him. He does not call him out of heaven. He does not use a vision or send an angel to carry His message. No! He Himself comes right down into that prison and stands by His grief-stricken servant, not to upbraid him. No, indeed! But to say once again that well-known and well-loved word, “Tharsei!” “Cheer up, Paul!” I think this transformed that dungeon into heaven itself.

It may be that you and I are at times sad, discouraged, cast down, filled with fears and dread; perhaps we have failed and dishonored the One we love. It may well be that at such a time we will hear His voice—the voice His own sheep know so well, and in tones of love, of hope, of confidence, we will hear Him call out name: (for He calleth His own sheep by name); and we will hear Him say,

“THARSEI! . . .”; “CHEER UP!”

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"Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercies, and will break
In blessings on your head."

The Shepherding of Lambs

Carlos Fariñas

In the Gospel of John 21:15-17, the risen Lord Jesus Christ, before ascending to the Father, gave instructions to Peter about caring for the flock that would remain on earth. Specifically, he commanded him to shepherd and feed the sheep, and to feed the lambs. It is interesting to note that the Lord, who called himself "the good shepherd," did not instruct Peter on how to shepherd the lambs, which, as we know, is a reference to younger believers. The interest lies in the fact that this was not an oversight on the Lord's part, but rather the assumption of a common and logical attitude: lambs are shepherded, that is, guided, cared for, and protected by adult sheep.

It is in this detail that we find precious lessons from the Lord to the sheep of His flock, that is, to the adults in the assemblies that gather in His precious Name.

Regardless of age, education, academic training, intelligence, social status, race, or culture, the youngest members of any congregation are inexperienced and prone to being seduced by the world; they may be tempted by concupiscences unknown to them until then, and become innocent victims of the deceit of the evil one. The Lord did not entrust this task to Peter, to be passed on to subsequent generations of men with the sublime commission of being bishops or elders among the People of God; rather, the commission falls on every adult member of the flock, men and women, who love the Lord above all things and desire to please Him and see men and women saved and useful in the testimony of the Gospel.

We are urged to "train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). This instruction refers to teaching the right way in God's eyes, how to walk in it without straying; to teach them the risks they run if they stray, to make them fully aware of God's zeal, and the warnings He gives to those who disobey Him. Our responsibility is such that we must strive to teach them in such a way that they have no doubts or confusion. We must avoid criticism and contempt, and seek to create a warm and loving environment that encourages them to continue. We must defend them from evil in a timely manner, be willing to fight for them, and help them in their weaknesses, without forgetting that no two people are identical and that it is wise to respect differences and exalt their strengths. We have a moral obligation to seek

out the weak and the sick, especially in the spiritual realm, and to carry on our shoulders those who have difficulty walking (Ezekiel 34:16). Teaching is reinforced by the authority that comes from example and testimony. Every young person needs to know that we have had similar experiences, and they will learn much from our successes, but also from our failures and how we overcame them. If they see in us examples of lives that are consecrated and especially happy despite arduous trials, they will admire us, and we know that it is much easier to imitate those we admire.

Every step we take should be taken with the thought that young people are following behind us, watching us to learn, both the good and the bad.

We must be quick to discipline those who err (Hebrews 12:6-9), but discipline does not mean harsh punishment, but timely correction, even if we sometimes have to be a little harsh. If we do it the right way, we will feel a lot of pain when we see one of those young people straying, especially because we will be asking ourselves where we failed.

New Testament Assemblies

A Plea for Divine Simplicity

Robert McClurkin

The great commission of our Lord, the four parts of which are seen in the last chapters of the four gospels, was threefold: the disciples were commissioned to preach the Gospel and by the truth of the Gospel, to make disciples out of all nations; they were to mark disciples in the waters of baptism; and they were to mold disciples by the teaching of the whole Word of God.

The Book of Acts reveals how this was carried out. When souls were saved through the preaching of the Gospel, they were baptized and gathered in congregations unto the precious Name of our Lord. The apostles never became pastors over each congregation, but put the burden of responsibility on the shoulders of the converts. Then, as soon as possible, they moved on and allowed the faith of the saints to work.

There are three reasons for the planting of New Testament assemblies:

Worldward, they consolidated the gains of the Gospel and became outposts for the further advancement of the Gospel of Christ.

Churchward, they were to be places of holy concord where the saints could share their joys and sorrows. They were to be for mutual edification and care and the training ground for the development of spiritual gift and leadership.

Godward, they were to be little sanctuaries from which the incense of worship and praise would ascend continually.

By what names are they to be known?

There is one Divine principle that guides us in this. Any name or names that do not embrace the whole is sectarian. Paul rebukes the Corinthians for factionalism when they said, "I am of Paul; and I am of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ." Each name only embraced each party, to the exclusion of all others.

The Spirit of God points to three serious sins that are committed in assuming unscriptural names: it is a sin against the Person of Christ, "Is Christ divided?" It is a sin against the Work of Christ, "Was Paul crucified for you?" It is a sin against the Name of Christ, "Were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Corinthians 1:12-13). The one Name of our glorious Lord is set over against all other names, as the only Name that can unite the saints in a practical way (v. 10). The truth of gathering in His Name alone means to gather in subjection to the authority of Christ which is enshrined in that Name. There only can true unity be realized.

By what features are New Testament churches to be distinguished?

Let me point out a few:

1. By the weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper was the center of the church life of the early saints. It was the hub from which all their activities radiated. Paul, by the Spirit, taught the Corinthians that in the Lord's Supper they expressed a fellowship (10:16, 17); they proclaimed a fact (11:26); they remembered a Person (11:24); and they cherished the hope of the Lord's return (11:26).

It is this weekly feast that has preserved the assemblies from the apostasy of the religious world, for in it the Spirit of God interprets the meaning of the Cross every Lord's day.

In the early days of assembly testimony, godly saints recognized that a physical circle was a beautiful symbol of our gathering around our Lord Himself, and of His presence in the midst of His own. The seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 formed a physical circle to give us the picture of our Lord in the midst of His own. Moreover, the physical circle loans itself to the type of meeting that we seek to conduct in the fear of God. We do not go to listen to a lecture where the seats are arranged for the audience to see a man on the platform or in a pulpit. We go to meet around Himself, and where the Spirit of God has liberty to use the variety of priestly functions and spiritual gift for the unfolding of the glories of Christ to every saint.

But the Devil could not leave these little companies alone. He hates Divine simplicity and Scriptural order. Today some have an obsession to change everything. They seek to push the Lord's Supper into a corner and make it secondary to other things. As other things crowd in, the worship of the saints is disturbed. When the emblems are passed around there is no time for the word

of ministry, when the hearts of the saints, melted by the felt presence of the Lord, are ready to receive it. Some assemblies are getting used to going through the procedure without the Word of God being opened at all. This new emphasis has created a restlessness among the Lord's people so that, not infrequently, two or three hymns are given out, one after the other, with no exercise on the part of the brethren to rise up and worship.

In many places the physical circle is destroyed. It is too much trouble to have to fix the seats for a more important meeting to follow. Thus the emphasis on the Lord's Supper is only superficial, compared to those early days when it was so precious to the hearts of God's people. A new generation has risen up, with its emphasis on youth and religious entertainment. Yet with all the unbounded activities among the young, there are few that come out with deeper convictions on the things of God and a deeper knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. The New Testament church was distinguished as the repository of Divine truth (1 Timothy 3:14-16).

Truth is embodied in Christ, "the truth as it in Jesus." It is enshrined in the Scriptures, "Thy word is truth," and entrusted to the church, "the pillar and ground of the truth." A casual acquaintance with the religious world will reveal that, in all, many truths are ignored or denied. Interdenominationalism exposes God's people to the errors of all. The safety of the assemblies lies in their separation. The role of the assemblies is to maintain a simple testimony to the whole truth of God. Only then will they become a haven of rest for weary saints who, when tired of the whole sham and mixture, seek a resting place for their confused spirits.

3. Another mark is the freedom of the Holy Spirit to work.

In His sovereignty He imparts gifts (1 Corinthians 12:11), and in His freedom He uses it as He pleases (1 Corinthians 14). In all ecclesiastical systems this important feature of the New Testament pattern is ignored. One, only, is recognized with the right to teach and to preach, and that by human ordination. We must insist on the Spirit's unfettered activity in the assembly, if we are to keep to the New Testament order. Here again we must sound the alarm among the people of God. Any professed assembly that appoints one man to be a pastor over them, runs contrary to the Word of God and challenges the sovereignty of the Spirit of God in His own house. Pastors are shepherds and shepherds are overseers. These are appointed by the Holy Spirit and are in the plural in every New Testament church.

4. Another feature of early Christianity was government.

Bishops, overseers, pastors, shepherds, elders, are names given to the men who take the oversight in God's assembly. These godly men give leadership to the Lord's people and act in discipline

whenever called for. Christendom is a far cry from this Divine pattern. Some, who never bought the truth, are prepared to sell it for an easy religious life. They speak now of appointing a pastor for each assembly, meaning of course, that he will become preacher and teacher as well. They are willing to pay a good salary to a man who will do all their work for them. This is not just a change of method; it is an infringement of Divine principles and departure from the truth of God.

Today we have acquired great organizational ability until many godly saints wonder if the Spirit of God will be organized out of business. We are convinced that the Devil is setting up machinery in many companies of the Lord's people that will make it easy for their return to Babylon and be swallowed up in the ecumenical spirit of our age.

5. Another distinguishing mark of the early saints was a faithful presentation of the Gospel. In their preaching, sin was exposed, sinners were convicted, and God's remedy for sin and the sinner was clearly presented. Assemblies are compared to lampstands to shed the light of truth upon the darkened souls of men. Conversions were accompanied with repentance. Are we producing conversions today without repentance? Are we not too often satisfied with a wishy-washy, sentimental believism? In some places, with a program of chorus singing and a "hurrah-boy" display, the whole thing is geared to attract only children and imbeciles. Let us "quit ourselves like men and be strong." The dignity of the assembly can only be maintained by an intelligence in the truth of God. The Bible anticipates every age, and if rightly interpreted, is more than a match for its opponents today. Let us establish ourselves in its blessed truths, and with humility and courage, carry the battle to the gate of the enemy. Let us equip our young people with the truth so that they will not be ashamed in the college, the university or in the field of their profession. There is enough religious entertainment in the sects. Let the assemblies become in reality "the pillar and the ground of the truth."

6. Another mark of Divine simplicity was the autonomy of each assembly. Centralization, either of funds, government or teaching, is contrary to what is written. There is a fellowship of assemblies because we are sharers of the whole truth of God. We should refuse to adopt any silly methods in the work of God that would grieve and offend godly saints that are seeking to maintain Divine simplicity. But in government, every assembly stands upon its own base, responsible to the Lord alone. Therefore we must, in faithfulness to truth, set our faces against any attempt to centralize, whether in teaching, as in a Bible school; or government, as in central oversight; or in funds, as in a missionary society.

Our path then is to walk apart from the religious world. Our aim should be to please our Lord alone and

seek to reclaim a knowledge of the truth of God. Then when weary souls, tired of the sham and confusion of Babylon, seek rest, they will find in the assemblies of the Lord's people little "Bethlehems" where there is "bread enough and to spare" without mixture of the notions of men.

"Who art Thou, Lord?"

Joel Portman

Acts 9:5 "And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest..."

Phil. 3:10 "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;"

There are many questions and short statements in God's Word that, if taken to our hearts, would be sufficient to guide us into a life that pleases and honors God. Some believers want to have a "thus saith the Lord" statement or a definite command before they will respond or obey but if so, they are living on a very low spiritual level. Israel had a rule book that defined all the conditions of the covenant relationship between them and God, but such is not the case for believers in this day of grace.

The question that Paul asked at the beginning of his experience with the Lord seems to define the entire course of his life from that moment on. This was the guiding star that drove him to pursue a course of constant steadfastness and intense spiritual exercise during his entire life. One might read the question that he uttered on the road nearing Damascus as simply referring to his immediate wonder who was speaking to him at that moment. Perhaps so, but the reality and implications of that query seem to dominate his thinking from that moment forward; "Who are you, Lord?" When he began to investigate and delve into the depths of that profound desire, he was entering into a study that, having begun at the moment, has continued even now into heaven's glory and the eternal state.

"Who" is more than a question involving learning the outward behavior and habits of another person. "Who" is a question that indicates a deep desire to understand the person, their character, identity, manners, purposes, and the entire variety of traits that mark them as an individual. This level of knowledge of another can only be gained by making that one individual the object of one's thinking and interest to a degree that dominates the entire being. It is never attained by casual acquaintance, by brief interactions, or by shallow examination. It is only realized by a determined and detailed occupation with all that pertains to that individual. As Paul neared the end of his life, he seems to describe the entirety of that investigation in Philippians 3. He had

deliberately cast away every source of religious pride or manner of attainments for the one, solitary purpose, and that was to "know Him." He was willing to forsake, lose, and be deprived of everything if he might gain that; "I count ALL things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge (ginosko) of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." (3:8).

There is hardly another person in the world who can equal that one supreme purpose that Paul expresses in this verse. Some have, no doubt, expressed the same desire. It should be true of each one of us, even though there are a multitude of distractions that hinder us. It had been his unique purpose since that Damascus road encounter. Yet he continues to write, "Not as though I had already attained (grasped), either were already perfect (complete): but I follow after, if that I may apprehend (lay hold on) that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." (v. 12). It was an unending, continuing striving on his part to fully grasp all that knowing Christ would mean doctrinally, but most of all, experientially. Knowing 'about' Christ wasn't the goal; knowing Christ was ALL.

Enoch constantly walked with God every day in a wicked environment (Gen. 5) from the day that he began when he was 65 years old. That beginning seems to be linked with what God showed him about the world that caused him to turn away from that sphere that was under judgment (Jude 14-15) to embrace a steady walk with God. He was in complete agreement with God's verdict on the wickedness of man and embraced steady companionship with an unseen God, moving in complete agreement with God and knowing God. We might understand that each day of walking with God in this way would result in more intimacy with God, more understanding of God's thoughts, more constancy with God with regard to his life and his deeds. Each day he would know God better than he had the previous day. He was "in the world but not of the world" because even though he rubbed shoulders with ungodly men, he was like the man in Psalm 1:1, who walked not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of the scornful. Our day isn't any different; what makes the difference is the inward, deep-seated purpose of our lives. If we began each day with the same question that Paul expressed, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do", how would this alter the pattern and object of our activities during the day? No doubt it would cause each believer to assess every activity by the criterion of "How will this affect my walk with the Lord? Will it draw me nearer to Him or away? How will it enable me to know Him better than before? And how does this fit in with that important goal in my life?"

We can learn God (and Christ) in many ways, but meditation on His Word is most essential. We can learn truth from study of the Bible, but many theologians have occupied themselves in this study without ever knowing

Him. We need to seek the PERSON behind the PAGE. We don't know Him simply by quickly reading a few verses from the Scripture that we might not remember during the day. He delights to reveal Himself through His Word and it is for this purpose that it was written and given to us. If we neglect the activity of filling our hearts and souls with its precious truth, we will fail to know Him. May His Spirit direct us increasingly to seek Him like the bride sought her beloved in the Song of Solomon: "By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth:..." (Song 3:1-2). "...I found Him whom my soul loveth" (v. 4).

There are many results that come from personally knowing God. One result is the

Enhancement of our Worship

Those who have been in and come from God's presence are those who have been so moved by the greatness of the infinite that they can express worship to Him in a far greater way than others. This is what we read in the precious expressions of the Psalms. Those men had been gazing on the Almighty and were bowed in worship as they gave utterance to their thoughts. Job, even in the depth of his suffering, expressed sublime truths as he thought of God in His greatness. Many may be able to give a routine recitation of different aspects of the attributes of God or may be able to recount the works and actions of God. They may only center their thoughts on the blessings that He gives. But worship is essentially an occupation with the infinite greatness of the Person, and only those know Him can express with sincerity and deepest appreciation (but only in some measure) the essential aspect of His Person. Theology is the study of God, and one has said that theology is the highest level of study that man can embark upon. No matter how much we might learn of Him from daily occupation with Him, we fall short of fully comprehending all that He is. What is missing in our day is the most essential, and that is time spent in simply contemplating the wonder and greatness of God. And the more that one is occupied with the study of God, the more readily he will confess that he has only begun to explore the fringes of His greatness.

Christian history is dotted with the records of those who truly dwelt in the light of God's presence and who made it their aim and joy to seek to know Him. Their lives were resplendent with a constant expression of their worship in word and in their being. By some, they were called "mystics" but they were those who constantly dwelt in God's presence and interacted with men from that basis. Our world order is so arranged (by the god of this world) that it robs the unsaved of their soul's salvation and robs God of the worship of His people. This influence has to be resisted if we are to be true worshippers, as He has saved and called us to be.

Abasement of our Pride

Being in His presence lowers our self-esteem which, contrary to what the world says, isn't too low; rather, it is too high. One has said that "man's estimation of himself is too high and his estimation of God is too low." Both cannot be equally esteemed. One who is conscious of the Lord and His infinite greatness is conscious, also, of his own unworthiness and unfitness for such an august presence and the interest of the eternal.

The words of Job again resound in our souls as he had heard God speaking to him: "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth." (40:4). One might say that this is a response to his realization of personal sinfulness, but it is so for all who are consciously in the HOLY presence. Even the cherubim and seraphim cover their faces and feet in His presence; how much more we, who are failing creatures of Adam's clay?

Strengthening our Exercise to serve

If one is consciously moving in such a powerful presence, there will be no force or power on earth that can hinder or dismay him. Paul, in the midst of the raging storm in Acts 27:23 could speak with boldness, "...whose I am and who I serve." In every circumstance of his life and service, he could and did move in the consciousness of the Lord being with him. Note the message in Acts 18:9-10, "Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city." The disciples were sent out by the Lord upon His ascension with the message to convey to the people and with His promise, "'Lo, I am with you always (all the days), even unto the end of the world (the age). Amen" (Matthew 28:20). It followed His statement, "All power (authority) is given unto me in heaven and in earth..." That promise is still applicable in our day and we can act accordingly.

But the simple text is not enough; only those who are acutely and personally conscious of that presence can move in the assurance of its reality. Words are not enough, but again, Christian history is replete with the examples of those who moved with the continual and personal realization that the Lord was with them, for they were with the Lord in the assurance of His Word. Reading the history of David Rea's service in Ireland gives many examples of a man who knew what it was to hear the voice of the Lord directing him to certain places of service despite the opposition that he knew existed. What was man, if the Lord was leading him? Such an intimate knowledge of a real, personal God is essential to give any servant assurance and boldness in a day when there is opposition to His work. We need more of that today.

Increasing our longing for His coming

The more than one knows His God, the more will he/she do "exploits" for God ("the people that do know their God

shall be strong, and do exploits"...Daniel 11:32). In equal measure, knowledge of the blessedness of being in God's presence will quicken one's desire to know more than this world and the flesh allow. How could it be otherwise? If I know someone who has become so precious and personal to me, will I not desire by any means possible to be able to know them better?

It seems that Paul, in Philippians 3:10-11, expressed his deep longing to know more of Christ, even to the point of wanting to die so that he might attain that goal. The chapter ends with that expressed desire, to be delivered from the present body and be transformed into the body of His glory and to be with and like Him eternally!

May our goal in life be more than gaining in this world and having a place. Salvation has brought us into an eternal relationship with divine Persons, and we should seek to know that relationship intimately even while we anticipate its fullness with joy.

Evangelization

In the final analysis, no one can lead another to God. All he can do is to lead the inquirer to the door of the kingdom and urge him onward. Between God and the returning soul there is a zone of obscurity through which he cannot see. It is the light that no man can approach unto and past which no one can go on his feet or by means of reason or theological knowledge. There faith must make its leap of pure trust into the arms of God crying with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him" (Job 13:15), or with Newton, "O Lord, I trust in Thee completely, and if I go to hell I'll go down standing on Thy Word."

It is this utter desperation that brings the witness, and yet I cannot tell anyone how to reach such a state. All I can do is to urge everyone to repent and believe on Jesus Christ. If the repentance is genuine and the faith real, all human confidence will come crashing down and the humbled soul will be forced to make its leap of faith alone.

The reader that cannot find his way from here is in all probability still impenitent. And let him beware of seeking cheap comfort from a text jockey who will cry "'Peace, peace,'... when there is no peace?" (Jeremiah 6:14). He had better by far take his Bible and retire to the secret place to seek God alone. If there's hope for him, he'll find it there. But he'll find it nowhere else.

A. W. Tozer