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# Shield of Faith

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## The Beginning of the Gospel

*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; {2} As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. {3} The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. {4} John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins* Mark 1:1-4.

The First four books of the New Testament, commonly referred to as The Gospels (from *god* and *spell*, Anglo-Saxon for *good message or news*, which is a translation of the Greek *euaggelion*), give us the record of one central truth from four different perspectives. The church had accepted each of the four gospels as a faithful and complementary witness to Jesus Christ. At an early date the church realized that the combined witness of the four gospels was required to declare the full significance of Christ.

Matthew writes his gospel account to give us the view of Jesus as the King. Mark, shows us that Jesus as the Servant-Messiah, our Ransom, who was prophesied by Isaiah some 750 years earlier. Luke, a physician, shows the genuine humanity of Jesus. In John's gospel, Jesus is firstly presented as the Word, Who is God, in Whom is life, Who then became flesh and dwelt (literally tabernacled) among us.

Because of their different perspectives, writers begin their accounts of the Gospel at different points. Matthew and Luke basically begin their accounts in Bethlehem with the birth of Jesus. John, portraying Jesus as the eternal God, begins before the creation of the world.

Mark, however, begins with the announcement of the coming Messiah by His forerunner, John the Baptist and with the beginning of the public ministry of

Jesus. Mark quotes from the Old Testament, reminding us that the coming of Christ was according to the plan of God which was announced centuries before. "As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee" Mark 1:2. While planned of God before the world began, the *good news* was proclaimed by the prophets as an longed-for future event. At the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, the *good news* came to men. "And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people" (Luke 2:10). (*Good tidings* is from the same Greek word that is often translated *gospel*.)

There is another beginning of the gospel, perhaps what Mark had under consideration when he wrote his account, that is the coming of the message of Jesus Christ to the heart of the born-again believer. Men may hear the words of the gospel with the natural hearing and may have a mental assent to the truth of it and still not profit from it. It is only when the heart is touched with the joyful sound that the gospel has its beginning to that individual.

When the gospel has its beginning in the heart of the individual the message of the Baptist is to be heeded: "...Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (Mark 1:3).

Prepare, *kataskeuazo*, was used in the secular writings with reference to the visit of a Roman senator to a region of Egypt. Directions are given for his welcome; "take care that at the proper places the guest chambers be got ready." The verb means, "to furnish, equip, prepare, make ready."

The *way* is, "a traveled way, a road." The idea would be clearer if one translated by the word "road."

It is the coming of God the Son, Messiah of Israel that is referred to by John the

Baptist, his forerunner. John only claimed to be "a voice," not "the voice" (John 1:23); *the* is not in the original Greek text. The One for whom he made ready the road, was the Son of God, the unique Son, Himself, Very God.

Thayer says when "prepare," *hetoimazo*, is used as here to prepare the way of the Lord, it is used as a figure "drawn from the oriental custom of sending on before kings on their journeys persons to level the roads and make them passable," thus, "to prepare the minds of men to give the Messiah a fit reception and secure His blessings." The verb is in the plural number, thus addressed to Israel. The tense in the Greek language makes it a summary command given with military snap and curtness, and *was a command to be obeyed at once*. That was the character of the preaching of the Baptist.

The Ancient of Days was to incarnate Himself in humanity, grow up from a little child to manhood, and offer Himself to Israel as its Messiah, its King. His road needed to be prepared, that is, the hearts of His chosen people must be ready. John's ministry was to see to it that Israel was ready to welcome its Messiah. The word "Lord" is without the article, the emphasis being upon character or quality. The road is a Lord's road, of such a quality as would belong to Jehovah.

John commanded to make His paths straight. The verb "make" is present imperative, issuing a command *to be obeyed continuously*. It should be a habit with Israel, a constant attitude, not a formal, abrupt welcome and that is all, but a welcome that would extend on and on, an habitual welcome that would be the natural expression of the heart.

"Straight" is *euthus*, meaning "straight, level." Robertson speaks of the wonderful Persian roads made for the couriers of the king, and then for the king himself, and of the Roman

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Empire, knit together by roads, some of which are in existence today. This word is not only used of straight and level roads, but also of a right way of life, as in II Peter 2:15, "Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness." The expression does not refer to a literal path or road down which the Lord would travel, but to the hearts of the people of Israel, and His entrance among them.

Just as John the Baptist's message was a call to action, the gospel has its beginning in the heart of those to whom it comes as a call that demands a response. The required response was *repentance*. John's message was "... Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). Jesus Himself had the same message: "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).

Repentance is a turning away from sin, disobedience, or rebellion and a turning back to God. In a more general sense, repentance means a change of mind or a feeling of remorse or regret for past conduct. True repentance is a "godly sorrow" for sin, an act of turning around and going in the opposite direction. This type of repentance leads to a fundamental change in a person's relationship to God.

To the multitudes John declared, "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" (Matt. 3:8; Luke 3:8). When Jesus began His ministry, He took up John's preaching of the message of repentance, expanding the message to include the good news of salvation: The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel" (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15).

In Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of God is seen the truth that repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin: by repentance, one turns away from sin; by faith, one turns toward God in the Lord Jesus Christ. Such a twofold turning, or conversion, is necessary for entrance into the kingdom (Matt. 18:3). "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent," said Jesus, "ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5).

After Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection,

His disciples continued His message of repentance and faith. Repentance is a turning from wickedness and dead works toward God and His glory, and a knowledge of the truth.

Just as John's command to make His paths straight is a command *to be obeyed immediately and continuously*, repentance is likewise to be continuous. It should be a habit with spiritual Israel, a constant attitude. Repentance should be natural expression of the heart. We are far too prone to view repentance as a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Many hear the message of repentance and think it is meant for the unconverted or to those who have backslidden into gross sin. Actually every one of us needs to daily repent.

True repentance is God centered. It first of all comes *from* God. No sinner of his own accord decides to turn to God. "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: {11} There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. {12} They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Romans 3:10-12). In every case, God touches the sinner before the sinner seeks God. Repentance is a result of God's grace. "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Romans 2:4).

God leads the sinner to repentance by convicting him of his sins and making him sorry for them. "Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. {10} For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (2 Corinthians 7:9-10).

Secondly, repentance is *to* God. The Lord's purpose in leading one to repentance is to bring that one into relationship with Himself. Amos' question, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3), shows the necessity of repentance. The sinner must be brought to agreement with God. It also shows God's purpose in granting repen-

tance, walking together. "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:9).

Thirdly, fellowship with the Lord is in and through the gospel. "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, {4} Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, {5} For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now" (Philippians 1:3-5). (Philippians 1:3-5) "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). The gospel shows the standard to be met for fellowship and the blessings of fellowship.

Finally, there is a human responsibility in repentance and fellowship. The message of John the Baptist was, "... Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (Mark 1:3). That is the responsibility of one to whom the "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1) has come.

"John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4). John preached that men were to repent, "bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" (Matthew 3:8), and be baptized. Baptism is not only a public profession of Christ and identifying with Him, it is also a commitment to "... walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). If the gospel has had its beginning in your heart and you haven't repented and been baptized, you should do so immediately.

If you have been baptized, you should remember that commitment to "walk in newness of life." Remember that the command to "prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" is to be a continuing process and a constant attitude of the heart.

Are you as close to the Lord as you want to be? Often our sinful nature causes us to get comfortable just where we are. The more important question is are you as close to the Lord as you *should be*?

## Bible Quiz

Some statements about the Christmas story are told so frequently that we assume they are correct. Answer true or false to each of the following statements. Check the references before you check your answers.

- \_\_\_ 1. Mary and Joseph traveled by donkey to Bethlehem, Luke 2:3-5.
- \_\_\_ 2. Jesus was laid in a manger, Luke 2:7.
- \_\_\_ 3. The cattle kept Joseph and Mary company in the stable, Luke 2:7.
- \_\_\_ 4. The shepherds were told to follow a star, Luke 2:11-12.
- \_\_\_ 5. Angels told the shepherds of Jesus' birth, Luke 2:11.
- \_\_\_ 6. Three Wise Men visited Jesus, Matthew 2:1.
- \_\_\_ 7. The Wise Men found Jesus in a house, Matthew 2:11.
- \_\_\_ 8. The angels sang, "Glory to God in the Highest," Luke 2:13-14.
- \_\_\_ 9. The Wise Men were kings who rode on camels, Matthew 2:1-2.
- \_\_\_ 10. Herod wanted to find Jesus to worship him, Matthew 2:8,12.
- \_\_\_ 11. The Wise Men presented gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, Matthew 2:11.

### "LIFE INDEED"

ONE has said: "*Life is* short--only four letters in it. Three quarters of it is a '*lie*' and half of it is an '*if*.'" We may add, by transposing the letters you can make it into a "*file*." The child of God makes something better of the word *life* by making an acrostic on it in association with Christ, and says —

**L Living in Christ**, I am not condemned—  
Rom. 8: 1, 2.

**I Instructed by Christ**, I am rested—  
Matt. 11: 29.

**F Following after Christ**, I have fellowship with Him— John 12:24-26.

**E Enduring through Christ**, I am victorious—Phil. 4: 13.

### Answers to Bible Quiz

1. false, we are not told; 2. true; 3. false, cattle are not mentioned; 4. false, the Wise Men were told to follow the star; 5. false, angel not angels; 6. false, no number is given; 7. true; 8. false, *singing* is not mentioned; 9. false, we are not told; 10. false, Herod wanted to kill him; 11. true

## WHO DECIDES?

By Elder Ron Yeakle

This article is written primarily for parents who have small children. Its intent is to stir up our minds, hearts, and hopefully actions.

There seems to be a growing trend among many today of leaving their home churches for other opportunities. The idea is that there is more to do because there is more that is offered. Many parents seem to say and feel that their children's friends go there and that their kids are able to be with those whom they go to school with. The question that comes to my mind is - *Who Decides?*

If you were to move into a new neighborhood and knew nothing of the services you were going to need - *Who Decides?* As a parent, you know that sooner or later you are going to need a doctor and a dentist. *Who Decides* on the doctor and dentist? Do we allow our children to make that decision? What about something less dramatic, when we get ready to buy groceries *Who Decides* what we will be having for dinner each week? If my parents left it up to me (when a child) it probably would have been pizza and hamburgers with fries each night. It may have been what I wanted, but it certainly was not what I needed.

When it comes to Spiritual matters, is it right to allow our children to decide where our family is going to worship? Is not this decision as important as any of the others? I happen to believe it is even more important than the others.

So, *Who Does Decide?* In the end, you as the parent decide. It may well be one of the biggest decisions you will ever make for your children. "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD; and the fruit of the womb is his reward" (Psalm 127:3).

## WHAT THE CREEK SAID

The other day, I flew over a swamp. The plane was low enough so that one could see clearly the water below; it was covered with an ugly green film. That swamp is a breeding place for mosquitoes and vermin of many kinds. There was nothing attractive about it, and it certainly was not an area where one would want to spend much time. That swamp is fed by a creek that runs up into the mountains. I am quite familiar with that creek because a number of times I have been up it fishing for rainbow trout. It is a beautiful creek, clear and sparkling and pure. Up in the mountains it runs in a rather narrow bed, and many times it is compelled to flow over rocks and rough places. As it flows on down out of hills into the lowlands, the creek says to itself, "I am tired of this restricted narrow life I have been forced to live. I want to spread out and take in more territory." But, in spreading out, it ceases to be the clear, pure creek and becomes a contaminated swamp.

The Christian faith leads one into life rather than away from life.

From The Charles L. Allen Treasury

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# Commitment

The urgency of a study of commitment has become very evident to me. As I felt an interest in such a study and realized the great need for it, I began to search books in my library for information on the subject. I searched approximately twenty books and, with the exception of the dictionaries, only one or two books mentioned it. It is needed and yet so little has been written about it. May this lesson stimulate our concern for this subject of such great importance.

Commitment is important because it is needed in so many areas of our lives. Those who hold political or ecclesiastical offices should carry out their duties with commitment. If a politician or a minister does not have a sense of commitment to his position or to those whom he represents or serves, he is not likely to benefit anyone. The lack of commitment in such roles results in poor government and apathetic congregations.

Commitment is also needed with regard to jobs or education. If an employee does not have a sense of commitment to his job and employer, then he is not likely to perform the job well. If a student does not have a commitment to achieving his education, he is likely to become a dropout or do just enough studying to remain in school. In such cases the job may be performed, but not with excellence, or the degree may be acquired, but not the education.

The marriage relationship also desperately needs commitment. Many people merely repeat vows, entering the holy estate of marriage in order to meet their personal needs or desires, but having no feeling of commitment toward the person to whom they are married. Without commitment marriages are often doomed to failure. The commitment of only one of the union is not always adequate to hold the marriage together. If either companion is not committed, the marriage will deteriorate until it is dissolved, through no fault of the one who is committed. In compatible marriages where couples live a lifetime together, there is generally evidence of a very deep sense of commitment.

Another relationship in which commitment is necessary is the spiritual relationship which exists among members of a church body. Many people are not aware of the need for commitment in their church relationships. They think of themselves only as a group of people who belong to the same organization, but church membership is far more than that.

Many churches stress the importance of commitment by adopting a formal statement of objectives which is sometimes referred to as a church covenant. Those who join a church are in effect obligating themselves to strive for the holy objectives of that body of believers. Often the objectives are not achieved because there are so few members who seriously regard their church covenant. Many members could not tell you whether or not they have such a covenant in their church. Some who are aware of its existence attach little or no importance to it and feel no need of commitment to the stated holy pledge. It seems unlikely that anyone will keep such solemn promises without substantial commitment. Perhaps the lack of such commitment accounts for the apathy and indifference which afflict so many in modern day Christianity, including some of our own churches. Let us recommit ourselves to the church to which we belong. As a sense of commitment spreads throughout the churches, they will then have a more powerful influence against sin in the world.

It is evident that we also need a greater dedication to church covenants as an expression of our commitment to Christ our Lord. This is commitment at its highest level. Without sincere loyalty to Christ, we probably will accomplish little in His church and service, and our religion will likely become an empty experience through which we endeavor to gratify ourselves. Too many have made a decision to live for Christ but have no commitment. As God spoke to their hearts by the Holy Spirit and Holy Word, they gradually withered and fell away as did those who received seed (the Word) in the stony places (Mt. 13:20-21). Remaining

faithful to the Lord for years beyond baptism and the fascination of a new experience requires a deep resolve to live for Jesus and never to turn from His ways. Decision may be momentary, but commitment is more lasting. Unfortunately many saved people have never made such a solemn dedication to Christ, yet the need to do so remains. Anyone truly devoted to Christ says, "...Lord, I will follow thee withersoever thou goest" (Luke 9:57).

It should now be obvious that commitment is an essential ingredient in life, in both the spiritual and secular realms. When this ingredient is left out life is not as pleasant as it could be. In baking, if one of the essential ingredients is omitted, the final product will not be right. The same is true with regard to the lives of people who are without commitment.

Commitment involves doing something, not simply feeling something. The word **commit** means to do or perform. In the Bible sin is something people commit or do. Notice 1 Cor. 10:8, "Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand." The word **committed** carries the idea of having entrusted a person with the care of something of value. John 5:22 says, "For the Father judgeth no man, but has committed all judgment unto the Son..." Similarly, God has given us many abilities and gifts, which He committed to our care and use. Finally, the word **commitment** conveys the idea of engagement or pledge. If we have commitment, we become engaged in the task and pledge ourselves to perform our duty. Those ideas may be combined or condensed to being obligated either by an intellectual conviction or by emotional ties to an idea or person. This study emphasizes that our greatest need is commitment to Christ and His ideals.

Jesus gave the commission, but we are to supply the commitment. We often refer to Matthew 28:19-20 as the "Great Commission." Jesus said,

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Devotions:

## Psalms In Reflection

From the book of the same title by Elder Len Dalton

*Psalm 6 To the chief Musician on Neginoth upon Sheminith, A Psalm of David. {1} O LORD, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. {2} Have mercy upon me, O LORD; for I am weak: O LORD, heal me; for my bones are vexed. {3} My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O LORD, how long? {4} Return, O LORD, deliver my soul: oh save me for thy mercies' sake. {5} For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks? {6} I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears. {7} Mine eye is consumed because of grief; it waxeth old because of all mine enemies. {8} Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for the LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping. {9} The LORD hath heard my supplication; the LORD will receive my prayer. {10} Let all mine enemies be ashamed and sore vexed: let them return and be ashamed suddenly.*

Perhaps a good title for this psalm would be: "Jehovah's Deliverance in Time of Chastisement." The first verse indicates that the psalmist is being rebuked and chastised, and he prays that Jehovah will not rebuke or chasten in anger or displeasure. He prays that, Jehovah may have mercy and heal him, because he is withered away and his bones are troubled. He says that his soul is also troubled and he desires to know how long this may continue. He also prays that Jehovah will deliver his soul and save him for loving-kindness' sake. He calls attention to the thought that in death there is no remembrance of Jehovah, and that in the grave no one will give thanks to Jehovah.

Beginning with verse six he gives a startling picture of his great grief. Of his tears, he says that they make his bed to swim by night and with them he watereth his couch. He says his eye wasteth away because of grief and that his eye waxeth away or becomes old because of his enemies. Because he feels that Jehovah has heard the voice of his weeping, he pleads with the workers of iniquity to depart from him.

This is known as the first of the seven great penitential psalms. It is not as truly penitential as some of the psalms which follow. It is rather a cry for deliverance from pain and sorrow and chastisement than from the sin which causes them. There is not a single sentence which reveals any profound consciousness of sorrow for sin.

Because he feels that Jehovah has heard his supplication, he feels confident that He will hear or receive his prayer. Of his enemies, he feels that they will all be put to shame and sore trouble. He, in perfect confidence, says that they shall be turned back and suddenly be put to shame. In hours of distress, what a comfort it is to remember that "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

Hymns and Hymn Writers

## Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

This "masterpiece of condensed theology" is not a carol, although at the Christmas season it falls lightly from the lips of thousands whose hearts are like flint to its message. Here is a hymn of the nativity that explores the depths and exposes the heights of the meaning of the birth of Jesus. Like all of Charles Wesley's hymns, it is anchored in doctrine and rich in scriptural allusion.

In its original form, the hymn contained ten four-line stanzas, and from the first it has known the editor's blue pencil. Written in 1739, shortly after Charles Wesley's conversion, it began *Hark! how all the welkin rings, Glory to the King of kings!*

Perhaps its first revision came when George Whitefield included it in his *Collection* in 1753, with the first two lines altered to the form we now use. In 1760 Martin Madan made other changes, and in 1774, in Conger's *Collection*, there were still other alterations. In a supplement to the *Tate and Brady Psalter* of 1782, the first two lines of the hymn were repeated as a refrain after each stanza, and this is the form we use today. Some hymnals now use only three stanzas.

Charles Wesley was born in 1707, in the rectory at Epworth, England, the eighteenth child of Samuel and Susanna Wesley. At the age of nine he left home to enter Westminster School, and from there went on to Oxford University. Three people greatly influenced his life. In the early years at home he received that thorough grounding in the Scriptures which Susanna gave to all her children. At Westminster he was guided largely by his eldest brother, Samuel, Jr., who was serving as head "usher," and at Oxford he came under the influence of his brother, John.

When Charles first went to Oxford, John had graduated and was serving as his father's curate in the church at Wroote. Charles spent his early years in the pursuit of pleasure and in frivolity, but he later organized the "Holy Club," whose members were so sober and methodical in observance of their spiritual exercises that they were called "Methodists" in derision. When John returned to Oxford as a tutor in Lincoln College, he assumed leadership of the group, although neither he nor Charles, for all their appearance of piety, had been genuinely converted.

In 1735 the Wesley brothers joined General Oglethorpe's expedition to Georgia in the New World. Charles was to be secretary to the general, and John would preach to the Indians. Their efforts were valiant but misguided and unsuccessful, and in five months both brothers were back in England. The trip, however, had made a lasting contribution to their lives through their association with a band of Moravians and their dynamic leader Peter Bohler. The buoyant faith and jubilant hymns of these people made a deep impression on the Wesleys, and they greatly desired to have the spiritual peace so evident in the lives of these Christians. Shortly after returning to England, first Charles, and then, a few days later, John, was converted, and from that time on they ceased not to preach and sing the gospel.

## THE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD

There are two things concerning the foreknowledge of God about which many are in ignorance: the meaning of the term, and its Scriptural scope. Because this ignorance is so widespread, it is easy for preachers and teachers to palm off perversions of this subject, even upon the people of God. There is only one safeguard against error, that is to be established in the faith. For that there has to be prayerful, diligent study, and a receiving with meekness the engrafted Word of God. Only then are we fortified against the attacks of those who assail us. There are those who misuse this very truth to discredit and deny the absolute sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners. Just as higher critics repudiate the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, and evolutionists, the work of God in creation, so some pseudo Bible teachers pervert His foreknowledge to set aside His unconditional election unto eternal life.

When the blessed subject of divine foreordination is expounded, when God's eternal choice of certain ones to be conformed to the image of His Son is set forth, the enemy sends along someone to argue that election is based upon the foreknowledge of God. This foreknowledge is interpreted to mean that God foresaw certain ones who would be more pliable than others and they would respond more readily to the strivings of the Spirit. So, because God knew they would believe, He predestinated them unto salvation. But such logic is radically wrong. It repudiates the truth of total depravity, for it argues that there is something good in some men. It takes away the independency of God, for it makes His decrees rest upon what He discovers in the creature.

It completely turns things upside down, for in saying God foresaw certain sinners who would believe in Christ, and because of this He predestinated them unto salvation, is the very reverse of the truth. Scripture affirms that God, in His sovereignty, singled out certain ones to be recipients of His distinguishing favors (Acts 13:48); therefore He determined to bestow upon them the gift of faith. False theology makes God's foreknowledge of our believing the cause of His election to salvation. However, God's election is the

cause, and our believing in Christ the effect.

Before we proceed further with this much misunderstood theme, let us define our terms. What is meant by "foreknowledge"? "To know beforehand" is the ready reply of many. But we must not jump to conclusions, nor must we turn to Webster's dictionary as the final court of appeal, for it is not a matter of the etymology of the term employed. What we need is to find out how the word is used in Scripture. The Holy Spirit's usage of an expression always defines its meaning and scope. Failure to apply this simple rule is responsible for so much confusion and error. So many people assume they already know the significance of a certain word used in Scripture, then they are too dilatory to test their assumptions with a concordance. Let us amplify.

Take the word "flesh." Its meaning appears so obvious that many would regard it as a waste of time to look up its various connections in Scripture. It is hastily assumed that the word is synonymous with the physical body, so no inquiry is made. But, in fact, *flesh* in Scripture frequently includes far more than what is corporeal; all that is embraced by the term can only be ascertained by a diligent comparison of every occurrence of it and by a study of each separate context.

Take the word "world." The average Bible reader imagines this word is the equivalent for the human race, and consequently, many passages where the term is found are wrongly interpreted. Take the word "immortality." Surely it requires no study! Obviously it has reference to the indestructibility of the soul. Ah, but it is wrong to assume anything where the Word of God is concerned. If the reader will take the trouble to carefully examine each passage where "mortal" and "immortal" are found, it will be seen these words are never applied to the soul, but always to the body.

Now what has just been said on "flesh," the "world," "immortality," applies with equal force to the terms "know" and "foreknow." Instead of imagining that these words signify no more than a simple cognition, carefully weigh the different passages in which they occur. The

word "foreknowledge" is not found in the Old Testament. But "know" occurs there frequently.

When that term is used in connection with God, it often signifies to regard with favor, denoting not mere cognition but an affection for the object in view. "I know thee by name" (Ex 33:17). "Ye have been rebellious against the LORD from the day that I knew you" (Deu 9:24). "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee" (Jer 1:5). "They have made princes, and I knew not" (Ho 8:4). "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2). In these passages "knew" signifies either "loved" or "appointed."

In like manner, the word "know" is frequently used in the New Testament, in the same sense as in the Old. "Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you" (Mt 7:23). "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine" (Jn 10:14). "If any man love God, the same is known of him" (1 Co 8:3). "The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Ti 2:19).

Now the word "foreknowledge" as it is used in the New Testament is less ambiguous than in its simple form "to know." If you carefully study every passage in which it occurs, you will discover that it is a moot point whether it ever has reference to the mere perception of events yet to take place. The fact is that *foreknowledge* is never used in Scripture in connection with events or actions; instead, it always refers to persons. It is persons God is said to "foreknow," not the actions of those persons. To prove this we will quote each passage where this expression is found.

The first occurs in Acts 2:23: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Careful attention to the wording of this verse shows that the apostle was not speaking of God's foreknowledge of the act of the crucifixion, but of the Person crucified: "Him (Christ) being delivered by."

The second is Rom. 8:29-30: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did

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## THE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD

*(Continued from page 6)*

predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called." Weigh well the pronoun used here. It is not what He did foreknow, but whom He did. It is not the surrendering of their wills nor the believing of their hearts, but the persons themselves, which is in view.

"God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew" (Ro 11:2). Once more the plain reference is to persons, and to persons only.

The last mention is in 1 Peter 1:2: "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." Who are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father?" The previous verse tells us the reference is to the "strangers scattered," i.e., the diaspora, the dispersion, the believing Jews. Thus, the reference is to persons, and not to their foreseen acts.

Now in view of these passages (and there are no more) what scriptural ground is there for anyone to say God "foreknew" the acts of certain ones, i.e., their "repenting and believing," and that because of those acts He elected them unto salvation? The answer is, None whatever. Scripture never speaks of repentance and faith as being foreseen or foreknown by God. Truly, He did know from all eternity that certain ones would repent and believe, yet this is not what Scripture refers to as the object of God's foreknowledge. The word uniformly refers to God's foreknowing persons; then let us "hold fast the form of sound words" (2 Tim. 1:13).

Another thing we want to call particular attention to is that the first two passages quoted above show plainly and teach implicitly that God's foreknowledge is not causative, that instead, something else lies behind, precedes it - something that is His own sovereign decree. Christ was "delivered by the (1) determinate counsel and (2) foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). His counsel or decree was the ground of His foreknowledge. So again in Romans 8:29. That verse opens with the word "for," which tells us to look back to what immediately precedes. What, then, does the previous verse say? This, "all things work together for good to them who are the called according to His pur-

pose." Thus God's "foreknowledge" is based upon His "purpose" or decree (see Ps 2:7).

God foreknows what will be because He has decreed it. It is therefore a reverse order of Scripture, putting the cart before the horse, to affirm that God elects because He foreknows people. The truth is, He foreknows because He has elected. This removes the cause of election from outside the creature, and places it in God's own sovereign will. God purposed Himself to elect a certain people, not because of anything good in them or from them, either actual or foreseen, but solely out of His own pleasure.

Why He chose the ones He did, we do not know. We can only say, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." The plain truth of Romans 8:29 is that God, before the foundation of the world, singled out certain sinners and appointed them unto salvation (2 Th 2:13). This is clear from the concluding words of the verse: "Predestinated to be conformed to the image of His son." God did not predestinate those whom He foreknew were conformed. On the contrary, those whom He foreknew (i.e., loved and elected) He predestinated "to be conformed." Their conformity to Christ is not the cause, but the effect of God's foreknowledge and predestination.

God did not elect any sinner because He foresaw that he would believe, for the simple but sufficient reason that no sinner ever believes until God gives him faith; just as no man sees until God gives him sight. Sight is God's gift, seeing is the consequence of my using His gift. So faith is God's gift (Eph 2:8-9), believing is the consequence of my using His gift. If it were true that God had elected certain ones to be saved because in due time they would believe, then that would make believing a meritorious act. In that event the saved sinner would have ground for "boasting," which Scripture emphatically denies (Eph 2:9). Surely God's Word is plain enough in teaching that believing is not a meritorious act. It affirms that Christians are a people "which had believed through grace" (Acts 18:27). If, then, they have believed "through grace," there is absolutely nothing meritorious about believing; if nothing meritorious, it could not be the ground or cause which moved God to

choose them. No! God's choice proceeds not from anything in us, or anything from us, but solely from His own sovereign pleasure. Once more, we read of "a remnant according to the election of grace" (Ro 11:5). There it is, plain enough; election itself is of grace, and grace is unmerited favor, something for which we had no claim upon God whatsoever.

It is highly important for us to have clear and scriptural views of the foreknowledge of God. Erroneous conceptions about it lead inevitably to thoughts most dishonoring to Him. The popular idea of divine foreknowledge is altogether inadequate. God not only knew the end from the beginning, but also He planned, fixed, predestinated everything from the beginning. [Everything concerning the redemption of the elect. --editor] And, as cause stands to effect, so God's purpose is the ground of His prescience. If then the reader is a real Christian, he is so because God chose him in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4); and chose not because He foresaw you would believe, but simply because it pleased Him to choose; chose you notwithstanding your natural unbelief. This being so, all glory and praise belongs alone to Him. You have no ground for taking any credit to yourself. You have "believed through grace" (Acts 18:27), and that, because your very election was "of grace" (Ro 11:5).

*Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)*  
From Gleanings In The Godhead

### What If?

What if God decided to stop leading us tomorrow because we didn't follow Him today?

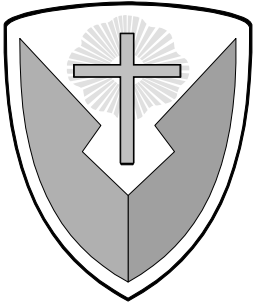
What if God couldn't take the time to bless us today because we couldn't take the time to thank Him yesterday?

What if God didn't walk with us today because we failed to recognize it as His day?

What if, God took away the Bible tomorrow because we would not read it today?

What if, the door of the church was closed because we did not open the door of our heart?

What if, God stopped loving and caring for us because we failed to love and care for others?



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And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works, Hebrews 10:24

## Commitment

(Continued from page 4)

"Go ye therefore, and teach 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." He gave that command to His apostles and disciples, so both they and we are to respond obediently. In the Bible, our Lord has made known His will for our lives. Whatever He commands us to do is His commission to us. Our willingness to obey the commandments depends on our being strongly devoted in our hearts to Him.

Have you ever made a commitment to our Lord Jesus Christ, to live for Him and do His will? If you never have, then you should give

high priority to doing so. Do you feel that Christ died for you on a cruel Roman cross? Do you realize that He possessed a great deal of commitment to the Father's will and to us in our need for salvation? Search then your heart, and I hope that you will feel the need for a greater commitment to Christ and all that is holy and good. If you are saved by His grace but have made no commitment to the Lord and His service, your life will never be as fulfilling and gratifying as otherwise it could be.

Elder W. H. Durrence  
 From *Studies From Scriptures*

## We Call Him 'God'

"They called Him 'Fool' and 'Traitor' as through the land He went; They cried out 'Agitator' and 'Brand of Discontent.' From altar and from steeple, upon this man forlorn, The priests and goodly people hurled wrath and bitter scorn. They called Him 'Cheat' and 'Fakir,' and drove Him from the door; They Shouted, 'Mischief Maker, begone, and come no more!' From border unto border they hounded Him, lest He 'Upset a stablished order and bring on anarchy.' At length they seized and tried Him that they might have their will And so they crucified Him upon a lonely hill. The outcast agitator, driven by scourge and rod, They called Him 'Fool' and 'Traitor and now we call Him 'God.'"

Author Unknown

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