PROGRESS OF REDEMPTION

Volume II

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Adolph Saphir has penned some very significant words regarding the unity between the Old and New Testaments which we share below. He said:

"(It is) like the child of whom King Solomon said 'Divide it', and the mother cried out, 'By no means slay the child'; for to divide Old Testament and New Testament is to take away the life of both, for they are not merely connected, nor are they merely harmonious, but they interpenetrate one another."!

Out of necessity, we have divided our own study of the Bible's unity into two divisions: God's acts in history and, now, the words He has spoken in relationship to His divine initiative. It would have been far better if we could have examined these two facets of unity the way they are presented in the Biblical record: inseparable! What Saphir says in regards to the Old and New Testaments
is likewise applicable in our own study. That is, what God does and what God says are not merely connected, nor are they merely harmonious, but they interpenetrate one another!

Thus, while we have in the first half of our study featured the historical operation of God as being the more foundational element of the Bible's unity, we must recognize that the acts of God are not divorced from the words which God has spoken. The latter predict and explain His actions! Each should be highly esteemed for the intimate--and complete--picture they give us of our Man-affectioned God.

In the first half of our study, we rightly focused on a God who doeth wonders in the earth, particularly since the historical operation of God is the foundational element of the Christian faith. And who can ponder the redemptive work of God and not echo in the inward man the words of celebration found in Psalm 118: "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes"? (Verse 23) In fact, one might think to himself, "There cannot be more to stir one's heart
for God, could there?!" We believe there is, and that's why we are so excited about the second half of our study.

Saphir lends the punctuation of wonderment to our own thesis when he stands in equal awe of "a living God who interferes by action...and a living God who interferes by revelation." It is the latter phenomenon that we should like to consider at present.

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As we studied the historical narrative sections of Scripture--those sections of the Bible that portray a God at work--we witnessed a record accentuated by power, momentum and impact. God at work is a dynamic operation! When we think in terms of God speaking, however, we seem oblivious to the same impulses in the Biblical record. Who, after all, considers doctrine (what God has said) as being dynamic?

While the term "doctrine" may have a "dry-facts-connotation" for many of us, Scripture says that the Word of God is quick (meaning alive) and powerful (Hebrews 4:12)! That is, God does not engage in idle talk; what He says is always attended by power, momentum and impact. He speaks in the same unique fashion in which He works! Before we elaborate on this idea, let us consider in our hearts the fact that revelation (God's revelation) is undiscoverable by mere observation. Neither genius nor intuition can find out the mind and Person of God! Saphir points out the wonder of revelation when he poses the following thought:
"Will you not admit of (God) what you have to admit of the youngest child and of the most limited human being, that, unless He chooses to tell you His thoughts and His will, you cannot know them?"  

Whew! Do you see now why it is such a privilege for us to trace what God has said? Too often, doctrine is presented as being detached from the Being of God-- "a body of principles to be taught."  

Doctrine, in reality, is not distinct from God; it is the fabric of communion, fellowship and intimacy. Revelation, in the true Biblical sense, then, is when "God as a person, in His sovereignty and of His abundant love, reveals Himself."  

DEFINITION OF TERMS  

We should like to mention again our indebtedness to the late Dr. Thomas Dehaney Bernard for inspiring the approach we have taken herein in regards to the unity of Scripture. It was Bernard's masterful work, The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament, that contributed significantly to the development of the present course, "Progress of Redemption", at Columbia Bible College.  

Although Bernard dealt only with the successive development of doctrine, in addition to restricting his study to the New Testament, it is from him that we gleaned the idea of a progressive, unfolding plan--not only in what God has said, but, also, in what God has done.
Since we are embarking on the study of what God has said, perhaps it behooves us at this point to spell out Bernard's definition of doctrine, and distinguish it from theology's definition of the term.

We have already cited a dictionary definition of the term "doctrine". It is "a body of principles to be taught." Theology, then, uses the term in this sense, except that it categorizes and systematizes these various principles under specific headings or topics. Thus, we have the doctrine (the systematized body of teaching) of the Holy Spirit, the doctrine of the Church, etc. Bernard does NOT implement this understanding of the term "doctrine"!

Rather, Bernard generalizes the term and says, simply, that doctrine is "divine teaching, or truth as communicated by God." In short, whenever God speaks, we have doctrine. We shall employ Bernard's usage of the term in our own study of what God has spoken.

Before we define the scope of our present study, we should emphasize the fact that the concepts of progress and unity are just as inherent in doctrine as they were in the historical activity of God. That is, when God speaks, He deposits a truth in seed form, and that seed grows—in marked stages—to full maturity. Just as in botany the seed contains the whole tree, so doctrine starts in an embryonic stage, yet evidences a systematic advance in its communication from God.

As Bernard observes, this progressive plan on which the course of divine teaching is perfected assures us that "the truth is not only preserved, but in some sense advanced,"
the definitions of it becoming more exact, the construction of it more systematic, and the deductions from it more numerous."

Moreover, although Bernard does not deal with doctrine in the Old Testament, he does acknowledge progress there, and his observations prepare us for somewhat of a contrast in the two Testaments:

"In the Old Testament the progress is protracted, interrupted, often languid, sometimes so dubious as to seem like retrogression. Accessions take place in sundry parts, in divers manners, at times under disguises of earthy forms, seeming to suggest mistakes which have to be themselves corrected. Yet through it all the doctrine grows, and the revelation draws nearer to the great disclosure. Then there is an entire suspension. We turn the vacant page which represents the silence of 400 years, and we are in the New Testament.

Now, again, there is progress, but rapid and unbroken. Our steps before were centuries; now they are but years. From the manger at Bethlehem on earth to the city of God coming down from Heaven, the great scheme of things unrolls before us without a check, without a break."12

Lastly, in regard to the unity found in the doctrine we are about to study, Bernard says this:

"Unless there be unity we have no right to speak of progress, for succession is of many, but progress is of one."13
The implications of Bernard's statement on unity will become clearer once we actually commence our study. First, however, let us define the scope of our next journey through Scripture.

**THE SCOPE OF PART 2**

You will recall that in the first part of our study, we confined ourselves to the historical books of the Bible. We did so because the historical books record the activity of God in human history, which we likewise hold to be the foundational unity of Scripture.

In Part 2, we will be tracing a complementary element of unity: what God has said. Now, it stands to reason that we simply cannot look at every time God speaks in Scripture! Therefore, we will confine our study to those sections of Scripture where God has spoken extensively. There are six such volumes of theology in the Biblical record. (Part 1 was divided into Acts and Scenes since God's redemptive activities unfold like a drama. Part 2, however, demands a different approach, and so we will consider the different volumes of doctrine found here. Again, a volume occurs wherever God speaks on a particular subject over an extended time.)

The six sections or bodies of doctrine which we will consider are listed below:
Volume 1: "The Promise"
God speaks to Abraham on seven different occasions regarding the specifics of the Abrahamic Covenant. (Gen. 12:1-3; Gen. 12: 7; Gen. 13:14-18; Gen. 15; Gen. 17; Gen. 18 and Gen. 22)

Volume 2: The Law
God speaks to Moses on Mt. Sinai and gives him the Decalogue and other statutes. (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy)

Volume 3: The Poetic Books
In a unique method, God conveys His thoughts and truths through the personal experiences of David and Solomon. (Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and Job)

Volume 4: The Prophets
God speaks to the prophets who serve as His spokesmen in times of crises. (All the prophetic books)

Volume 5: The Gospels
God speaks through the Son. The Word becomes flesh. (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)

Volume 6: The Epistles and Revelation
God speaks to the Church through a series of letters. (The epistles and the book of Revelation) *Revelation, due to its distinct nature, will be covered separately from the Epistles.
THE IMPORTANCE OF WHEN GOD SPEAKS

We should like to remind our readers, first of all, that God does not engage in idle talk. As S.B. Frost so critically observes:

"The Word of God" is an expressive phrase, often used, but seldom defined. As a result, there is a good deal of misapprehension with regard to it. Most Christians, when asked why the Bible is sometimes called 'The Word of God' would reply that it is because this book is primarily about him, his character and his ways. But this is not the true reason. 'The Word of God' is the utterance of God, and this not thought of as vaguely put forth in the universe at large, but as directed at man."

Secondly, God does not speak routinely. We, for example, are accustomed to pastors delivering the Word of God at 11 a.m. every Sunday morning. God does not speak to us in that way. Rather, His doctrine comes at times when it is needed. God always speaks to a need! Doctrine, therefore, cannot be divorced from historical setting. In light of this truth, we should like to present a chart depicting where the six volumes we will be studying fit into the historical picture. This is done to secure in the reader's mind the fact that what God says and what God does go hand and hand and comprise, we believe, the essence of the Bible's unity.
NOW THAT WE HAVE SPECIFIED THE SIX VOLUMES OF DOCTRINE WHICH WE HOPE TO EXAMINE, LET US CLARIFY OUR FORMAT FOR STUDYING THESE. IT IS OUR INTENT TO STUDY AT LEAST FIVE DIFFERENT FACETS OF EACH BODY OF DOCTRINE. AS WE LOOK AT EACH VOLUME, THEN, WE WILL CONSIDER:

1. At what point it comes in God's program, and what is the need to which it speaks.

2. The content. What does God say here?

3. The progressive unfolding of the doctrine. Is there progress in this particular body of revelation?

4. The method in which God speaks. How does God communicate His truth in this particular situation?

5. The response which God's Word requires. Since God's words are directed at man, what is the specific response hoped for as a result of God's communicating to him?

We believe that one of the most fascinating aspects of this study is tracing the various methods God has used in communicating to mankind (Point 4 above). Hebrews 1:1 reminds us that God spoke to our fathers by the prophets "in many and various ways" (RSV)!

Do you know the specific approaches God has used, and why they are so special? Arthur Xac spells out the importance of the way in which God communicates below:
"When speaking to man God adapts his speech to man's spiritual and intellectual state and to his needs. 'Not all at once, in sudden burst of glory, did God reveal Himself to human hearts... Only as men are able to receive it will God reveal the riches of His grace.'"\(^{15}\)

Adolph Saphir likewise delights in the method in which God has communicated with mankind:

"The things in Scripture are not stated in a systematic and methodical form; but in a method far more wonderful and convincing. Just as in nature there is the most harmonious irregularity--not like a systematic and botanical garden--just as in nature all the different powers co-exist and work together in a way which we are not able to understand...so is it in the Scriptures that from beginning to end, at sundry times and in divers manners, by gradual manifestations, acts, miracles, words, commandments, institutions, God has unfolded His whole counsel."\(^{16}\)

Indeed, one of the most tender pictures we have of God is the result of the way in which He spoke to a solitary pilgrim in Haran. Oh, to have stood in Abraham's place when God so lovingly took him into His confidence!
Enough cannot be said about Genesis 12:1-3. It is perhaps the most astounding passage in all of Scripture, for in three mere verses we find all that matters to the heart of God!

In fact, these three verses are the seedbed for ALL our theology! There is no "new" theology beyond what we find in the Abrahamic Covenant, according to Albertus Pieters:

"What in the Bible proceeds this text (Genesis 12:1-3) is introduction, and all that follows, to the last chapter of Revelation, is the story of the development and fulfillment of this promise." 17

S.B. Frost suggests that the Promise God made to Abraham is "the great eschatological hope of the whole Bible." 18 He concurs with Pieters' statement above when he says that "This promise, once given, dominates the whole (Biblical) story, and not of the patriarchal period only." 19

We noted earlier that God will address Abraham a total of seven times in this particular volume of doctrine,
but Genesis 12:1-3 remains the key encounter between God and Abraham. Pieters sees this mere three-verse covenant as the seed from which the whole program of God will grow and mature. Says Pieters:

"All other promises to Abraham and his seed are no more than details, working out the central thought that he and his people should be a source of blessing to the whole world."20

Hopefully, by now, you are anxious to look at this wonderful covenant known throughout Scripture simply as "The Promise". Before we look at the content of this amazing covenant, however, we must consider at what point in time God comes to speak to Abraham. That is, what is the need that occasioned such a vital communication between God and man?

"GO FROM YOUR COUNTRY..."

Our minds cannot fathom how Abraham must have felt when the Lord of glory appeared to him and said, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives, And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you" (NASB). Too often, we forget that God's first words in His redemptive program were spoken to a man whose family was yet steeped in idolatry, and who did not know the Living God.21
If you were Abraham, and God had just instructed you with these words, what would your need be? Wouldn't you want to know more about the plans God had for you? Dear friends, that's exactly why God speaks here. The Everlasting God is about to reveal to Abraham what He will do throughout the whole program of redemption! It's as if God has come alongside of Abraham, put His arm around his shoulder, and said, "This is what I'm going to do, Abraham, and this is how you are involved in it."

Genesis 12:1-3, then, serves a two-fold purpose. One, it serves as a constitution or Magna Carta detailing God's global strategy, and, two, it offers direction, assurance and hope to one who might otherwise stagger at his calling.

In Genesis 1 through 11, we saw how man, left on his own, plummeted the entire race into misery. God, out of the depth of His pity and compassion, sought to remedy man's plight. It is to Abraham, then, that God reveals His earthward desire. Since Abraham is an instrument in this same enterprise, he needs to know something of God's plans and the certainty of God's guidance.

Since God deposits truth in seed form, Abraham will need further revelation regarding the outworking of the Promise, and that is what we will find when we look at the other occasions in Genesis in which God speaks to Abraham.
Matthew Henry calls Genesis 12:1-3 "an encouraging promise", and then corrects himself. "Nay, it is a complication of promises, many, and exceedingly great."\(^{22}\) How true, his words!

In like manner, J. Oscar Boyd calls this three-verse promise a "limitless blessing".\(^{23}\) Just these two testimonies of introduction should tell you something about the extraordinary content of the Promise!

But perhaps what is even more incredible is the beauteous picture we have of Jehovah in this scene. So often, we center on John 3:16 as being the epitome of Jehovah's loving and generous nature ("For God so loved... He gave"), yet here we find an equally astounding picture of God's eternal affection towards man.

Listen to the Promise, and, as you do, note the subject, verb and object in every precious line!

* "I will make you a great nation."
* "I will bless you."
* "I will make your name great."
* "I will make you a blessing to others."
* "I will bless those who bless you."
* "I will curse those who curse you."
* "I will bless all the families of the earth through you."
Did you note how many times God said, "I will" in this passage?! It is certainly evident that God is going to do something on Abraham's behalf. The New Testament uses a theological term in place of "I will" whenever making reference to something God is going to do for us. Do you know what the word is? Look! Have you ever read this verse?

"For by grace (what God has done!) you have been saved..."

--Ephesians 2:8

When God appears to Abraham, He does so in grace! Too often, we think of the dispensation of grace as being only in the New Testament. Remember where we are in God's program, friend! We are at the beginning. God begins His redemptive work in grace. He is going to remedy mankind's plight, yet through a man! (You will recall from Part 1 of our study that God seemingly always chooses to operate through a man. This is truly a demonstration of His grace!)

We don't have time to elaborate upon the seven-fold blessing which God bestows upon Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, but we do challenge the reader to investigate our claim that these three verses are the seedbed for all our theology. The entire Biblical record is nothing more than an outworking of these embryonic blessings. And they are still being honored today. For example, when God told Abraham that his name would become renown through all the earth, do you realize that three major religions claim Abraham as their "father": Christianity, Judaism and Moslems!
Finally, regarding the last blessing in the Promise ("In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed"), Matthew Henry says this:

"This was the promise that crowned all the rest; for it points to the Messiah, in whom all the promises are yea and amen."24 (Italics in text).

Oh! Before we go on to the next section, let us expound a little more on our earlier statement that Genesis 12:1-3 gives us a beauteous picture of Jehovah. Not only does He act in grace and through an individual, but His giving results in overflow! It would have been enough if God had appeared to Abraham and had announced nothing more than the fact that Abraham would be a great and mighty nation. Yet here we find Jehovah, so anxious to reveal His inward joy and plan, exhausting in one breath His glorious intent for all the ages to come! He didn't have to do that, yet God makes His secrets known to those who love Him!

THE PROGRESS OF DOCTRINE

God's entire redemptive program is laid out in seed form in Genesis 12:1-3. We have suggested that a seed truth, when first spoken, must contain all that will later unfold and grow. Such is the essence of progress. Abraham was 75-years-old the first time God spoke to him. He was 100-years-old the last time God spoke to him. It is our present task, then, to trace the progress of doctrine as it is seen in this promise to Abraham.
We hinted earlier that it would be impossible to trace out every facet of the Promise, so, for the sake of our study, we will consider the building of the nation as the primary seed in Genesis 12:1-3. If we are correct in believing that God speaks the same way He works (i.e., progressively), we should see the development of this particular seed throughout this volume of doctrine. Here, then, is our starting point:

**Genesis 12:2**

○ The seed: "I will make a nation."

We shall now consider the six other times in which God addresses Abraham. The second time God speaks in relationship to the Promise is found in Genesis 12:7. See if we have any further details regarding the building of the nation here:

**Genesis 12:7**

"And the Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land (of Canaan)."*

Do you see the sprouts, dear friend? God initially said He would build a nation. What must you have in order to establish a bona fide nation? People and land! We now know that this nation will consist of Israelites and that Canaan shall be the homeland of Abraham's people. The seed is beginning to grow!
The third instance in which God addresses Abraham gives us further information pertaining to the nation. See if you can spot the new data for yourself:

Genesis 13:14-18

"And the Lord said to Abram....'Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth...Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you. Then Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre...and there he built an altar to the Lord."

You might be thinking to yourself that there is nothing new in the above section since we've already mentioned Abraham's descendants and the land. Nevertheless, there is very pertinent, additional information here! Do you know how many squabbles there are today over property lines? If you ever have the opportunity to purchase a piece of land for yourself, you will soon realize how important it is to have the exact dimensions of the parcel you are considering! That's the new sprout in Genesis 13:14-18; God specifies the limits and boundaries of the land He is planning to give to Abraham.

And there's another sprout in terms of Abraham's descendants. In Genesis 12:7, we learned only that Abraham's descendants would settle in the land. Now we know something of the might and populace of this yet-to-be-formed nation. Its people will be exceedingly great in number!
In Genesis 15, where God addresses Abraham for the fourth time, we have some more details regarding Abraham's descendants. Abraham, you will remember, is an old man. His wife is barren. Yet God has promised him descendants—offspring—that number as the stars! It is at this point that Abraham cries out to know how on earth God is going to fulfill His promise when Abraham has only one heir, and that heir is not even his own natural child!

In Genesis 15:2, we find Abraham asking, "Is Eliezer (Abraham's chief servant\textsuperscript{25}) the one whom through You will increase my descendants, or will You give me a son?" It is at this point that God clarifies that Abraham's heir will not be Eliezer, but, rather, "one who shall come forth from your own body" (verse 4). Eliezer would have been a legitimate heir, but God has chosen to give Abraham a natural son. Thus, we know something that was heretofore unclear; we have seen another sprout in relationship to Abraham's descendants!

We also receive some more data regarding the settlement of Canaan. Abraham's people will not immediately possess it, but, instead, will be oppressed and enslaved in another land for 400 years. Isn't it amazing how here, in the very beginning of God's program, He informs a man who will never live to see it that his descendants will be in Egypt for a particular length of time!

The third sprout we see in Genesis 15 is found in verses 18 through 21, where God further defines the boundaries of Canaan, this time by listing names of rivers and nations.
Before we leave Genesis 15, we would like to point out something peculiar here. When God began conversing with Abraham in this scene, He told him not to fear for "I am a shield to you." The King James Version says, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." We mention this because the statement is not linked to either the land aspect of the Promise, nor the people aspect.

We hope to show later on that "I am" is different from "I will", but, for now, suffice it to say that this particular verse is a new seed, not a development of one already mentioned. Genesis 17 opens with a similar word from God ("I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless"), and will likewise be considered down the road.

When we come to Genesis 17, which is the fifth time God speaks extensively to Abraham, we hit upon some very explicit details regarding the Promise. You will remember how in Chapter 15 God told Abraham that he would have a natural child, and that Eliezer, a mere servant born in Abraham's house, was not intended to be Abraham's heir. This information is very important in view of what Abraham and his wife schemed in the meanwhile!

You see, Abraham was 75-years-old when God promised him descendants. When he was nearing 85, and still did not have a child, he and his wife came up with a plan to help God save face. Everyone is familiar with the story of Abraham and Hagar—and Ishmael! The Arab-Israeli conflict
we witness to this very day had its beginnings here! Something transpired here, however, that is even more frightful than the birth of the Arab-Israeli tensions, and it has to do with Abraham's and Sarah's unbelief. God had promised them that He would do something; that He would give Abraham countless descendants. Rather than wait upon God to do what He said He would, Abraham and Sarah rushed ahead and "accomplished" the task on their own. Do you know the New Testament term for such actions? Have you ever heard of "works"?

When God says He will do something on our behalf, that is called grace. But when men run ahead of Him, and try to do for themselves what God has promised He will do for them, we have the grace-works conflict. And we find this conflict in the Old Testament as well as the New!

Man, unfortunately, not only doubts the word of God, he doubts the ways in which God brings His purposes to pass. You see, Abraham and Sarah not only questioned the fact that Abraham would have a natural heir, they both laughed at the channel through which He said He would accomplish His pledge. That's what Genesis 17:15-21 is all about.

Sarah is 90-years-old in this precious vignette, and Ishmael, Abraham's son by Hagar, is just entering his teens. It is at this point that God comes to Abraham and announces the incredible fact that, despite her years, Sarah will indeed give Abraham a son. Furthermore, she will be a mother of nations and of kings! (Genesis 17:16) Note Abraham's response to God's promise:
What was Abraham laughing at? The promise of numerous descendants? No; Abraham did not laugh when God first promised to make him a great nation, nor did he laugh when the promise of countless descendants was reiterated on various occasions prior to this one. As far as Abraham was concerned—at least theologically—power belonged to God and He could do anything He desired. Where Abraham broke down in his trust—and where we too readily follow—was in accepting God's choice of a channel through which to display His power!

Abraham considers God's choice of channels and laughs! He has not yet learned what we know from 1 Corinthians 1:27, and that is that God "has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong." Abraham knew that Sarah's body was D-E-A-D to the possibility of bearing a child, and so he cries out: "Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!"

What Abraham is really saying in this response is, "I don't know about Sarah bearing a son, Lord, but here's..."
Ishmael. Wouldn't he be a more feasible heir? Work through him to do all the things You have promised. At least I can see the possibilities...."

Note God's tender response to Abraham's struggle! He says, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac...And I will establish My covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year." (Genesis 17:19,21) Just so there will be no room for doubt in Abraham's mind, God not only reassures Abraham that Sarah will indeed have a son, He gives the name of the son and his date of birth!

So it is that we find a lot of progress of doctrine in Genesis 17! God gives Abraham and Sarah their new names; He reiterates the promise of countless descendants; He reports that nations and kings shall be born of the couple; He seals His covenant with Abraham's seed through the sign of circumcision; He announces the forthcoming birth of Isaac and guarantees an everlasting covenant with his descendants!

Many Christians today seem to think that God takes pleasure in keeping them guessing about His will for their lives. They resign themselves to the idea that God reveals as little as possible regarding their future--that guidance comes in one-day-doses. Abraham would surely take issue with such thinking! Jehovah does not indulge in generalities; He told Abraham about things he wouldn't even live to see (such as Israel's 400-year sojourn in Egypt). But more important than this, He told him things he needed to "see" in order to live on in the certainty of God's intimate care.
We have noted that the encounters between God and man, as Scripture records them for us, are varied and uniquely adapted to the situation at hand. Some of the encounters will never be rehearsed again, and so we view them with a sense of privilege and inward awe. Genesis 18 is such an encounter.

In this scene, we find Abraham sitting at the door of his tent, enjoying the sanctuary of shade provided by the surrounding oaks, when three travellers happen by. We know from verse 1 that one of these three travellers was no ordinary sojourner!

"Now the Lord appeared to (Abraham) by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day."

God, of course, has appeared to Abraham on previous occasions, but never like this! You see, the Lord not only stops by Abraham's home, but Abraham persuades Him to stay for lunch! Oh, friends! Don't treat such an intimate encounter as common—or worse yet, as invisible! When you look into the Word of God, consider too the setting—for therein are the ways of God often discovered.

Remember, then, that what we see in Genesis 18 is not merely a slice of Eastern culture (e.g., Abraham's hospitality to strangers), it is a look at our God and one of the precious ways He has employed for communing with man! To fully appre-
ciate this scene, put yourself in Abraham's place. How would you feel if you were sitting on your front porch and Jesus happened by—in Person! Can you fathom yourself asking Him to stay and have something to eat?! Even today, our God is looking for such precious fellowship!

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him and he with Me."

—Revelation 3:20

In verses 9 through 15, we hear God's promise to Abraham regarding a natural-born son reiterated. When Sarah learns that she, not a handmaid, is to bear this special child, she laughs at the thought. She, like her husband, has difficulty accepting God's channel for demonstrating His power. Nevertheless, Jehovah dismisses her questioning—and all man's questioning—with the supreme question: "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14). For the final time, God reassures the couple that all He has promised will, indeed, come to pass:

"At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son."

—Genesis 18:14

Do you see what a climax this statement is?! Don't read it as if it said "La-la-la"! Abraham was 75-years-old when God first appeared to him with the promise of a son. Now, a quarter of a century later, God announces Isaac's
birth: "Abraham, within a year...within a year!...Isaac shall be born." Oh, that we might sense the hilarious hope of this passage! All that Abraham was promised, all that God so eagerly shared with him in tumbling-down delight—all this was to come to fruition within a year!

Put yourself in Abraham's place here. What if God had promised you something that utterly staggered your mind, and you waited and waited and waited for it to come to pass? And now, God appears to you and says, "All that I promised to you earlier will be realized within a year", wouldn't you be estatic with joy? No wonder God felt compelled to personally deliver this word to Abraham!

Indeed, the news Abraham received on this particular day, as well as the way in which God delivered it, would have been enough to meditate upon for weeks, yet after Abraham's three guests conclude the purpose of their visit to his home, something equally incredible happens!

As you read Genesis 18:17-33, don't forget that God had completed His business with Abraham; there was no reason whatsoever for the three visitors to tarry. That's why Genesis 18:17 is such an unexpected—yet pleasant—turn of events. Just as the travelers are about to bid Abraham farewell and go on to their next mission, God seems torn at the thought of leaving! And then, as if to empty His anguish in one breath, the Lord asks:

"Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?"

—Genesis 18:17
What a marvelous thing, this! Here we find the concept that staggered our minds in the first half of our study; the fact that God desires to tell His servants what He is going to do before He actually executes His plans! Jesus, in John 15:15, spells out quite clearly that a master is not obliged to tell a servant anything—yet here we find Jehovah wanting to share all His heart with Abraham! Matthew Henry gives one possible reason for Abraham's being informed of Sodom's coming destruction:

"Abraham must know, for he is a friend and a favourite. Those who by faith live a life of communion with God cannot but know more of his mind than other people." 26

The remainder of Genesis 18 records Abraham's intercessory agony on behalf of the saints who might be residing in the wicked city. Those who are familiar with the story realize that God graciously rescues Abraham's nephew Lot prior to the destruction of the corrupted city. Our main focus, however, has been the fact that God shares His heart and mind with those who love Him, and we should always count this as a demonstration of His exceeding grace!

Genesis 22, where we find God commanding Abraham to offer his only son as a sacrifice, is considered by many as the most staggering episode in all the Bible! Some commentators have entitled this chapter "The trial of Abraham's faith", but such a title fails to convey the actual heat of the fire. Something grueling transpires here.
Matthew Henry suggests that Abraham may have expected some further word regarding the Promise when God appeared to him this seventh and final time. After all, all God's previous appearances had been to further define the Covenant introduced in Genesis 12:1-3. When God finally speaks, however, every word becomes "a sword in Abraham's bones": 27

Who can know which phrases of God's command resounded in tormenting echoes inside Abraham's mind. It would have been easier, perhaps, if the command had been abrupt and of few words, such as "Kill thy son!", but, no, every word, select and deliberate, fulfilled its abrasive mission:

"Take your son, your only son, your precious son, that very son beloved by you—take him, Isaac, the one for whom you waited a quarter of a century, and sacrifice this dear one to Me!"

Matthew Henry notes that the three days' journey to the land of Moriah made the command all the more devastating since Abraham would have had that much more time to consider his action. 28 Imagine the agony of this father, occasionally resting his hand on Isaac's shoulder as the two walked along, knowing that this same hand would soon hold a knife over the lad's very body!

There was even more to Abraham's trial than what we have listed above, however. One must remember that God's entire redemptive program—all that He had promised to do through Abraham—was contingent upon Isaac's survival. Abraham, therefore, was faced with more than just the loss of his only flesh-and-blood child; Isaac's premature death would also signal the complete ruin of God's redemptive
enterprise! (See Genesis 21:12; Romans 9:7-10 and Hebrews 11:18 for an understanding of Isaac's importance in God's program.)

In light of the above, then, Abraham's decision to obey the Lord's command is all the more incredible. He is willing, if that is what God wants, to start from scratch in believing God to yet fulfill His good word. It is no wonder that the Apostle Paul magnifies Abraham's faith in Romans 4:20-21.

"With respect to the promise of God, (Abraham) did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform."

We already have said that Abraham's decision to obey God's command was commendable, but we need to remember that his decision to obey was based upon a precious faith in God. Remember how Sarah and Abraham wavered in Genesis 16? When it looked as though God was not going to make good His promise of a son, Sarah came up with an alternative plan. Abraham obviously didn't hesitate at Sarah's suggestion that he take Hagar, an Egyptian, as his wife and for the purpose of bearing him a son. The actions of Abraham and Sarah said loud and clear that they did not expect God to be true to His word!

But look at Abraham in this most severe crucible. There is no indication in Scripture that Abraham fretted at God's command, nor that he questioned the wisdom of it. Moreover, when Abraham and his son take leave of the men
who accompanied them to the land of Moriah, Abraham tells them, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will return to you." Abraham didn't say this just so the men would not suspect he was up to something! Even when Isaac questions his father about the lamb to be offered as a sacrifice, Abraham assures his son that God would provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering! (Genesis 22:8)

We all know the outcome of Abraham's testing; God rescinds His order and Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of promise, is graciously spared. Abraham's obedience results in the ultimate sealing of the covenant between him and God. The Lord swears by Himself that every aspect of the Promise shall be fulfilled.

###

Depicted below is a summary glance at the seven different occasions in which God unfolded details of the Promise which He made to Abraham. You can see how many sprouts resulted from the initial seed which we began with in Genesis 12:1-3.

1. Gen. 12:1-3
2. Gen. 12:7
4. Gen. 15
5. Gen. 17
6. Gen. 18
7. Gen. 22
HOW GOD SPEAKS TO ABRAHAM

We have suggested that the manner in which God speaks is always related to the content to be delivered. In this first volume of doctrine, Genesis 12 through Genesis 22, God has singled out a man through whom He will launch His redemptive program. He does not leave Abraham in the dark or out on a limb regarding His intentions. Genesis 12:1-3 constitutes, in fact, a kind of constitution in which God sets forth His basic strategy for redeeming the human race.

Abraham had a need for this revelation because direction, assurance and knowledge of what God intended to do through him were essential to his moving on in God’s redemptive operation! Such was the need, but, oh, look at the method! Scripture says that Abraham was called the friend of God (see James 2:23). Alexander Cruden explains that "The friend of God is a title given to Abraham because of his close relations with God..." 28

What tone of voice do you use when you are speaking to a special friend? Do you speak authoritatively? Do you "lay down the law"? Friends, we are not at Mt. Sinai yet! God has not revealed the Law to Abraham; He has revealed a promise. How do you speak a promise to someone? God did it by first befriending Abraham. Genesis 12:7 says that Jehovah appeared to Abraham. The patriarch didn't just hear a voice from out of nowhere; God was present, visible! He didn't say, "Abraham, report to My office at 9 a.m. tomorrow morning!". No; He stopped by for lunch; He put Abraham at ease despite uncertainties. This was not the time to speak in the wind, the thunder or a trembling earth.
S.B. Frost seems amazed by this first encounter between God and man. We need to dwell on his precious observation:

"Instead of drawing up a code of behavior to which men must conform, or organizing a state which they must join, or even revealing a religious system of ideas which they must accept, (God) prefers to chose one man (Abraham), and reveal Himself as a person to him, and let him convey to others what he has learned." 29

When one considers the setting and background of Genesis 12, the idea of God appearing to one lone individual and patiently revealing His plans to him becomes all the more staggering. Man has made a mess of things up to this point! One would expect God to seize Abraham by the shoulders and, with disciplining air, tell him to "shape up!" for his assignment.

God's gentle and intimate approach to Abraham is unique, and we need to remember that God will not speak this way again.

THE DESIRED RESPONSE

Whenever God promises to do something for us, there can only be one appropriate response: believe Him! Joseph Rhymer points out something very important regarding the Promise made to Abraham and his seed. He notes:
What is faith? We have already defined grace and works in this section, so let us spell out the essence of faith here. Faith is exercised when man believes God will do what He said. Abraham believed God is, pure and simple, the definition of the New Testament term faith.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OLD TESTAMENT</th>
<th>NEW TESTAMENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God: &quot;I will do it.&quot;</td>
<td>Grace</td>
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<tr>
<td>Man will do it instead of God</td>
<td>Works</td>
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<tr>
<td>Man believes God will do it</td>
<td>Faith</td>
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</tbody>
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Before going on to the next body of doctrine, the Law, the reader should answer the following questions in his own mind regarding the Promise (Genesis 12-Genesis 22):

1. What was the need for this revelation?
2. What does the content concern itself with?
3. What are the progressive steps in this volume?
4. What is God's method of communication?
5. What response is necessitated by this doctrine?

2 Ibid., p. 137.

3 Ibid., p. 22.


7 Davies, p. 212.


9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., p. 13.

12 Ibid., p. 21.

13 Ibid., p. 25.


16 Saphir, p. 31.


18 Frost, p. 43.

19 Ibid., p. 42.

20 Pieters, p. 12.

22ibid.


26Henry, p. 34.

27ibid, p. 40.


29Frost, p. 90.

Exodus 20 is probably one of the most familiar chapters in the Bible—even among the secular world—since it is that portion of Scripture which contains the Decalogue, or, to use the more common expression, "The Ten Commandments".

Unfortunately, Exodus 20 is also one of the least understood chapters of the Bible, especially in terms of its content and the view of God's character presented therein. Both the content and God's image have been grossly distorted due to a misapprehension of the word "Law". Hopefully, as we study this second volume of doctrine, the reader will see that law grew out of God's loving concern for His people and is, therefore, a very good thing.

One misconception about this volume of doctrine is that it consists of only ten commands, period! In reality, God's message to His people at this point in history incorporates Exodus 19 through Exodus 40 and the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy! This, then, is what actually constitutes the "Law".
And what a tremendous revelation! Oh, that we could see God's love here, His wonderful guidance and care, instead of some rigid body of regulations that all begin "Thou shalt not".

We have said before that no doctrine should be viewed apart from its historical setting, particularly since God speaks to address a need. What, then, were the circumstances that prompted a word from God here?

First of all, remember where God's people are at this point in history; they are at the foot of Mt. Sinai, awaiting instruction for entering into Canaan. Also remember what God's people are at this moment; they are a great multitude needing some kind of direction. G. Campbell Morgan suggests they are not yet a nation, but, rather, a "mob", and so there is a critical need for organization and leadership.

Dear reader, you have to stand at the foot of Mt. Sinai to appreciate what transpires here! God has just brought His people up out of Egypt where they had been enslaved and oppressed for 400 years. During these four centuries they did whatever the Egyptians demanded of them; they lived their lives according to the ways of Egypt. And now, they are free!

Have you ever wondered why the Israelites wanted to return to Egypt a few days after their glorious deliverance? Be assured that it wasn't the leeks and the garlics and the onions that attracted them, not really. They wanted to return to Egypt because, despite the cruel bondage there, they at least had a secure way of life.
What did they have in the Sinai desert? Uncertainty, confusion, disorganization. To be sure, it was a restless and anxious multitude that stood at the foot of the mountain waiting for Moses to return with God's revelation. These people needed more than a few commandments to give them a sense of security, direction and unity—and God wonderfully responded to their urgent need.

Some people think God merely gave Israel ten commands, but this is not so. He gave the Israelites something so vital to their next move that they could not even exist as a bona fide nation without it! He gave Israel a culture, a way of life, a common understanding of how to behave and function together as a society separated unto God! In short, the communiqué from Mt. Sinai was nothing less than Jehovah's edition of How Shall We Then Live?

How important is culture? Well, first of all, let us define it. A culture is "The totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns characteristic of a people." These behavior patterns, mind you, have interested four different fields of science—which should tell you something of their importance! The psychologist sees them as a basic condition of learning. Since man has no instincts (built-in behavior patterns) such as animals do, he must learn how to function in a society. Since man is a learner (disciple), that which is to be learned must be set before him.

The sociologist is interested in behavior patterns because they are the vital requirement for establishing and maintaining unity within a society. In a similar sense, the anthropologist sees these modes of behavior as the framework for a culture. Finally, the political scientist views these behavioral peculiarities as a kind of constitution for a nation. So you can see, we are not dealing with
an insignificant issue in this volume of doctrine! Although we have entitled this body of doctrine as "Law", it should be kept in mind that we are talking about a way of life, not just a body of statutes.

**CONTENT**

In our day, far too many people think they have captured the essence of the Law when they speak of its two parts: the do's and the don't's or the shall's and shall nots'. To some degree, that is the content of the Law, but it is far more than that! Perhaps we can focus on its greater essence by asking, "What is the Law all about?"

To be sure, the Law has more to say than "Do this!" and "Don't do that!". A cursory glance through the book of Exodus reveals innumerable laws. There are laws governing menservants, women servants, menstealers, cursers of parents, smiters, etc. There are laws concerning theft, damage, trusts, borrowing, fornication, witchcraft, bestiality, idolatry, strangers, widows. There are laws dealing with slander and false witness, justice, charitableness, the year of rest and the sabbath. There are also instructions for building the tabernacle, and commands regarding sacrifices, religious feasts and other sacred rites.

One's first response to such content could be, "So what? What is so great about all of this?" David seemed to think the Law was pretty good, but many of us are hard-pressed to explain his delight. ("O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day." -- Psalm 119:97) Is
David exalting over rules concerning bestiality or grain offerings, or is there something else causing his praise? Perhaps if we see the Law from David's perspective, we too shall delight in the law of the Lord.

Remember what we did when we looked at the Promise in Genesis 12:1-3? The reader was asked to note the subject and verb in that passage. We shall repeat this exercise in relationship to the Law by looking at five sample commandments. What is the common denominator in these verses?

Exodus 20:3 -- "You shall have no other gods before Me."
Exodus 20:4 -- "You shall not make for yourself an idol."
Exodus 20:5 -- "You shall not worship (images)."
Exodus 20:7 -- "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain."
Exodus 20:13 -- "You shall not murder."

Whoa! Do you see the responsibility put on man in these selections? How could David possibly rejoice over so many requirements? No wonder some people view God as a relentless task-master! But, ah, friend, do you realize that although there are hundreds of ordinances found in Scripture, God really expects only two things—two!—from His people? God desires first that His people be like Him, and, second, that they walk in fellowship with Him. Is there anything unreasonable or harsh in these two expectations?

Can you imagine God telling you two things by which to govern all of your life: "Be like Me!" and "Fellowship with Me!"? Well, believe it or not, that is the sum total of the Law! To validate our statement, we need to go back
to Genesis 17:1 which is the seed for the entire law of God! Do you remember these words which we briefly considered?

Genesis 17:1
"I am the almighty God; walk before Me and be thou perfect." (KJV)

Do you see it now?

BE THOU PERFECT = BE LIKE GOD
WALK BEFORE ME = FELLOWSHIP

Wow! It's no wonder David expressed such exhilarating praise for the Law! What could be more glorious than guidelines for becoming like Jehovah, and having the opportunity to fellowship with the Living God?!

Theology divides these two aspects of the Law into moral and ceremonial law. The moral law, of course, has to do with man's character and the need for him to fashion his life after God (Exodus 20-24 and Deuteronomy). The ceremonial law pertains to man's fellowship with God and his need to be in communion and relationship with the Lord. (Exodus 25-40 and Leviticus).

The drawing below depicts the two aspects of the Law under its theological headings:
This has to do with what?
*Your behavior
*Your character
*How you are to do everything you do

Example:
Build Me a sanctuary
Make an altar
Offer sacrifices

This has to do with what?
*Worship
*Fellowship
*Relationship
*Communion

Examples:
Worship Me only
Observe the sabbath
Honor your parents

Before we look at the progressive development of this doctrine, perhaps we should caution the reader regarding the inadequacy of theological labels for God's precious truths. When you mention "moral law", it is bound to conjure up a distorted image of God in the minds of some people. This is so unfortunate. You see, God did not give the moral law (also called "the civil law") to place man in bondage or to restrict his freedom, although some conclude that. The very fact that God gave a moral law means that He is deeply concerned about how you think, how you act, how you relate to others, your adjustment to the society in which you live, and other vital aspects of your sojourn on Earth.
And this is the beauty of the moral law: God is not so much concerned with monitoring man's behavior as He is concerned with his quality of life. The moral law, then, is like a Manufacturer's Manual telling man how to live life to its fullest! God has designed a specific life-style for His creatures, and they cannot reach fulfillment and true happiness unless they are living the way God intended. We could go so far as to say that a human being is not living normally until he lives his life unto God. This is unfathomable love—that God cares so intimately for our well-being.

The term "ceremonial law" also evokes a wrong connotation for many. Most people associate it with ritual or going through motions that have no true significance. Even today our society balks at one of the most intimate ceremonies there is: a wedding. We watch two people getting married, and what do we say? "Oh, that's just a ceremony!" Is it? Is a marriage license only a piece of paper? Dear friends, that ceremony marks the beginning of two lives spent in continual fellowship! That makes ceremony pretty important now, doesn't it?

Aldolph Saphir reminds us that God's ceremonial law far transcends our understanding of it. He notes:

"People imagine by 'ceremonial' something to strike the senses, something to add pomp and beauty to services, something in which there is no reality. There were no ceremonies in Israel. It was all the preaching of eternal truths and of spiritual substances, and real transactions between God and the people. This ceremonial law, as it is called, contains the most sublime and touching aspect of the will of God: 'Whatever ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God'."
The ceremonial law grows out of Exodus 25:1-8 wherein Moses and the people are instructed to build a sanctuary for God. While pages of Scripture are devoted to describing lavers and lampstands and ornamentation, we should not lose sight of why God wanted a tabernacle constructed in the first place. Exodus 25:8 says that God desired His people to build a sanctuary for one reason: "that I may dwell among them."

Do you know another name for the tabernacle? The Old Testament calls it the tent of...meeting. The ceremonial law, dear friends, initiates a vital relationship! Again, we lose something when we use a theological abstraction to describe God's desire to commune with man. The word "fellowship"—especially as it relates to the ceremonial law—is best understood in terms of God's longing. God is saying not merely, "Build Me a sanctuary"; He's saying, "I want to meet with you and I want you to come and meet with Me".

The ceremonial law, then, is the outworking of God's desire for relationship! He wants to fellowship with man, to meet with man, and so He makes provision for it through a place of meeting and a means of approach (in the Old Testament, this would be the sacrificial system)!

Hopefully, the reader has a new understanding of Law in view of the above study. The commandments which were given in both the moral and ceremonial law were for the purpose of bringing God and man together in a more intimate union. Again, Saphir captures the true essence of the Law when he writes:
"You remember the gentle voice in that little upper chamber in Jerusalem that said, 'If ye love Me, keep my commandments.' That is the voice of Jehovah. No other being--angel or man--no other could say, 'The root of all that is pleasing to God is that you have affection for Me personally.'

Now that we have surveyed the content of the Law, we shall look more concisely at how it progresses from that small seed in Genesis 17:1 to the tremendous body of ordinances, laws, statutes and commands that we find in the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

**THE PROGRESSIVE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LAW**

By virtue of studying the above content, we have already seen how the Law grew from a tiny seed in Genesis 17:1 to "Ten Words" (i.e., The Ten Commandments) in Exodus 20, and then to the many laws and ordinances we find in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. What is so amazing about Genesis 17:1 is the fact that three mere words, "Be ye perfect", are the seed of every moral uction God has ever spoken! Every moral concept, from Genesis to Revelation, is rooted in this seed, "Be ye perfect!"

It is not incorrect to say that the word "perfect" includes the entire moral law or that the word "walk" (also found in Genesis 17:1) includes the entire ceremonial law. "Be ye perfect, and walk before Me." The
Law is the progressive unfolding of these two truths—that God wants us to live like Him and to love Him. This progressive development is given in summary form below:

1. **Genesis 17:1.** This is the seed of all law. (Remember there are two aspects of this!)

2. The moral law grows from the "ten words" of Exodus 20:17ff to the many laws of Exodus 21-24 and then to the full law of Deuteronomy.

3. The ceremonial law grows from the simple word of Exodus 25:1-8 ("Build Me a sanctuary") to the simple ritual of Exodus 26-40 and, finally, to the full ritual of Leviticus.

**GOD'S METHOD FOR REVEALING LAW**

Remember how God spoke to Abraham regarding the Promise? He spoke as a friend to a friend. In that particular situation, God was dealing with one man, one man who needed reassurance and guidance. It was necessary that God speak to him gently. The very word "promise" demands soft tones and an intimate setting. We have suggested that God always uses a method of speaking that is particularly adapted to His message. Would you communicate a law to someone the same way you would communicate a promise?

When God spoke the Law, He was not addressing one man; He was dealing with an aggregate of people who needed some organization. This group of people could have turned into a mob if God had not responded to their critical need. Scripture gives a vivid picture of the scene at Mt. Sinai:
"And all the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance."

--Exodus 20:18

That's what it was like when God spoke to the people regarding the Law! It was terrifying—and the people cried out that they never wanted God to speak to them this way again. They said to Moses:

"Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, lest we die."

--Exodus 20:19

In short, the people were saying, "Moses, you tell us what God has to say, but, please; don't let Him confront us directly. He is so awesome!" Now why do you suppose it was necessary for God to speak like this? Keep in mind that God is not disciplining nor rebuking Israel at this point; they have done nothing wrong. So why does God speak so thunderously here?

Perhaps we can better understand His method if we put before us a simple definition of law:
LAW = ONE PERSON TELLING ANOTHER PERSON WHAT TO DO.

You can see from the above that the key issue behind any law is authority. God employs the thunder, lightning, smoke, etc., to communicate authority. He has the right to tell His people what to do, and they need to respect that right. God was not out to scare the wits out of His people. Rather, He intended that such authoritative instructions would keep them on the straight and narrow. Moses even tells the people, "Fear not!" Moses does not want the crowd to so cringe under the physical manifestations of God's authority that they miss the reason He has spoken thus:

"And Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may sin not.'"

---Exodus 20:20

In order to lead these people, then, God had to establish His right to direct them. It was only proper that He should use an authoritative method. Moreover, God was giving them a set of laws--important laws--and a law that has no authority behind it becomes totally ineffective and meaningless. A commanding voice and an intense setting are not inappropriate aids in establishing
one's authority.

THE PROPER RESPONSE TO THE LAW

When God's people heard Him speak with such authority, it didn't take much deliberating on their part to respond. He said, "Thou shalt"; they said, "We will!"

"And all the people answered together and said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do!'"

---Exodus 19:8

The people have purposed to obey here; they have made a commitment which has yet to be played out. Our concern is not over how this obedience is to be accomplished, but only that a vow has been made here—a vow of commitment very similar to that made between a bride and groom. In the marital relationship, commitment is the foundational element that facilitates the carrying out of the husband's and wife's responsibility toward one another.

When Israel said "yes" to Jehovah here, it was the equivalent of a bride saying "I do" to her beloved (See Hosea 2:14,15). Remember that Moses didn't want the people to respond out of fear, but out of a desire to commit themselves to the one true God. Mt. Sinai, even with its ominous mood, marks the beginning of a love affair between God and man.
It should be noted that the Promise (grace) and the Law were the basic revelations to Israel and were in force through the entire Old Testament period. And this fact is quite remarkable, seeing as how the two seem so contrary to one another! In one, God says, "I will", meaning He will carry out a particular responsibility. In the other, He says, "You will", meaning the individual must carry out whatever needs to be done.

Christians today are still divided over whether they are under the Law since Scripture teaches that Christ's death nullified the Mosaic system. Some take the position that only the ceremonial part of the law was abrogated (i.e., the sacrificial system), not the moral code. Regardless of your own position on this issue, one thing is certain: Israel WAS under Law, and, simultaneously, under grace (the Promise)! God apparently didn't see a conflict between the two, or He never would have introduced them into the same historical era.

What we need to do in order to resolve the grace-works controversy is to study whatever light God has given on this seeming paradox. Galatians 3:1 through 4:7 is an excellent commentary on this issue. It is here that God enumerates, through the Apostle Paul, five basic principles for understanding how grace and law function together in God's economy.

As we study these five principles, keep in mind that the grace-works issue is still very much alive in our own day!
Charles Hodge has said that "No road to perdition has ever been more thronged than that of false doctrine." Perhaps that is why Galatians 3:1 through 4:7 is such a crucial text. Here we find the Apostle Paul rebuking the Galatians for their relapse into legalism so soon after their introduction to Christian liberty.

Indeed, the apostle is duly upset after learning that certain Judaizers had brain-washed new Christians into believing that the observance of the ceremonial law was an essential part of the plan of salvation. Paul challenges this false teaching—which amounts to salvation by works—by laying down five basic principles for understanding the grace-works controversy. The reader is asked to read Galatians 3:1 through 4:7 in preparation for studying the five principles below.

PRINCIPLE # 1:
GOD WORKS EXCLUSIVELY BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

In Galatians 3:2, Paul presses the Galatians for one solitary answer regarding their salvation. He wants to know if they were "born again" by God's power or by their own efforts. This, then, was the problem among the Galatians; they had been saved by grace, but were now trying to be sanctified through their own efforts. They had started their walk by grace through faith but reverted
to works. Paul argues that God started by grace and continues with it! Salvation has always been God's doing, he says; it is by grace through faith that men are saved—always. Paul insists that God doesn't start us off with grace only to let us finish on our own merit. No, he says, we grow from grace to grace; no man is justified by the works of the law (Galatians 2:16; 3:11).

To prove his point, Paul takes the Galatians back to Abraham—to the very person through whom God began His redemptive work. Abraham, mind you, lived 430 years before the Law was given! What, then, accounted for his righteous standing before God? The same thing that accounts for man's righteous standing before God today! Grace through faith!

"Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."

--Galatians 3:6

God's redemptive program at the beginning was through grace ("I will"), and through men who believed God would do what He said (faith). Faith was not introduced into God's program in the first century church; it was God's way of bestowing spiritual blessing from the very first! It is still the only way He operates. That is, whether we look at Abraham or the sons of Abraham (today's believer), all have been saved by grace through faith. That's the plan God initiated in Genesis 12, and nothing has changed it since—including the advent of the Law!
PRINCIPLE #2:
The Law Did Not Replace the Promise (Grace)

In the Promise, God began dealing with man on the basis of faith. The Law, given after the Promise, did not change the principle of grace through faith (Galatians 3:15-18).

Paul argues that once a contract was made with Abraham, it could not be replaced by a later one. God had made a seven-fold promise to Abraham (remember the "I will's"?), and swore by Himself that every word of it would be fulfilled. Paul notes that even contracts between men have certain fixed features which cannot be changed once they are ratified.

Maybe you have never been present for the reading of someone's will after a funeral, but you might be shocked at how many squabbles result over what Grandpa had meant to leave to so-and-so but never put it in writing. A verbal promise—even if made by the testator when he was alive—will not be honored unless it also appears in the actual will. Moreover, once a will has been drawn up, the testator cannot randomly add new stipulations whenever he or she thinks of them. The document can only be changed by going through legal channels!

Paul's argument, then, is simply this: the Promise is a permanent contract. God didn't come to Abraham and say, "I will do it", only to change His mind down the road and insist "You do it"! There may seem to be
a contradiction, says Paul, but God is still honoring the first contract (the Promise). The second contract, the Law, serves a different function from grace—which is Paul's third principle.

PRINCIPLE # 3:
THE LAW SERVES TO LIMIT, CURB, RESTRICT SIN

In Galatians 3:19, Paul asks a very logical question: "Why the Law then?" If God continues to operate the way He began, i.e., through grace, then what purpose does the Law serve, and what part does it have in our walking a life pleasing to God?

Although the Law is not redemptive (it is unable to impart life), it does serve to show man his sinfulness and, thus, his need for grace, Paul says. The two examples below should help the reader see how very vital the Law is in this regard.

In Romans 3:20, Paul clearly teaches that the knowledge of sin comes through the Law. Thus, while the Law is not redemptive (able to save), it is reflective (able to show man his errors)! It is, in fact, like a mirror. When you first wake up in the morning, you may not know how badly your hair needs combing—until you look in a mirror. The mirror gives you knowledge of your physical appearance (good, bad or ugly), but it cannot tidy up your appearance for you.

In truth, you could stand in front of the mirror
all day long, and that unkempt hair would remain unkempt! The mirror serves only to reveal, to show the good or bad of our physical appearance. It is our responsibility to act upon the knowledge that has been given by the mirror.

In a similar fashion, the Law gives us knowledge of our spiritual-moral condition. It can help us adjust, correct, or abandon our behavior in light of God's immutable standard. Again, let us use a simple illustration.

If a man is driving 55 m.p.h. down a road and suddenly comes upon a sign that says the speed limit is 35 m.p.h., the posting of that law serves to tell him he is violating an ordinance. The sign cannot make him drive 35 m.p.h., but it can show the man whether or not he needs to adjust his speed.

God's Law, then, reveals sin. More than that, it reveals man's sinfulness, his bent toward wrong-doing. Throughout the ages, man has been conceited enough to think he has perfectly kept God's Law. In reality, God did not give the Law so that man could work at mastering it (which is an impossibility anyway!), but that he would see how short he falls, and would call on God's help (grace).

In essence, then, Law and grace work together! Law does not replace grace, but has been placed along-
side of it to reveal sin.

Throught the Law, God has not only made us aware of our short-comings, He has stimulated our desire for a solution to our dilemma. The Law is not redemptive; the Savior is!

PRINCIPLE # 4:
THE PROMISE AND THE LAW ARE NOT ANTAGONISTIC

On the surface, it looks as if God has put two standards upon man; he is supposed to trust God implicitly to do all, yet, he is also obliged to carry out certain responsibilities himself. This is the crux of the whole grace-law controversy.

A primary fact to acknowledge here, however, is that God never contradicts Himself. He does not tease in the area of righteousness: "I will do it. No, you shall!" Rather, we must realize that law and grace each have a specific purpose. Both must be allowed to function in their particular way.

We noted above that Law cannot impart life; God never intended that it would. It serves only as a mirror. That is, it can reveal wrong, but it cannot right it. It can reveal our imperfections, but cannot
But, ah, let's look at grace. Grace, as we defined it earlier, is God doing for us what we are unable to do for ourselves. Jesus died on the cross to give us salvation and righteousness. His righteousness was imputed to us; we did not earn it nor deserve it.

By looking at the Law, I may know that something is wrong, but by grace, I can have righteousness imputed to me! And so the Law points out my sin, but points me to a Savior, even Jesus. In simple terms, the Law shows my need, and grace meets it.

**PRINCIPLE # 5:**

**THE LAW OF CHRIST REPLACES THE MOSAIC LAW**

One of the most astounding, and, perhaps, misunderstood, truths of Scripture is the phenomenal fact that a Christian is no longer under the Law! Galatians 3:25 says, "But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor (i.e., Law)."

In Galatians 3:23, the apostle Paul suggests that the Law kept us in custody or ward (a play-pen even!)... until faith came. The crucial question here is when did faith come? We said earlier that faith has been operational since Abraham, yet it is clear that Abraham's faith is not intended here. If, however, we interpret faith as meaning Messiah—that is, Messiah as the object of our faith—then we can appreciate what Paul is saying here.
Paul is saying that all men were kept in ward by the Law prior to Christ's coming. That is, they were schooled by a tutor; told what to do and what not to do. In essence, men were treated as children, and the Law was like a play-pen, serving to confine, restrict and define the limits of their actions. Merrill Unger elaborates further on the purpose of the Law below:

"Dispensationally it marked a period of child-training for the Jew. It was a pedagogue to train him as a minor with childish 'do's' and 'don'ts,' til he came to the period of spiritual adulthood in Christ, 24-25, when the responsibility of love responds spontaneously to the benefits conferred by grace."10

When Christ came ("the faith which was later to be revealed"--Galatians 3:23), man's position was changed tremendously:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act I</th>
<th>Act II</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before Christ</td>
<td>After Christ</td>
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<td>children.</td>
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It should be noted here that some disagreement exists among theologians as to whether the ceremonial law was abolished through Christ's death, or both moral and ceremonial aspects of the law. Paul says the Mosaic Law--all that was given at Mt. Sinai!
In other words, a Christian today does not have to offer an animal sacrifice, nor go to Jerusalem to worship... nor is he under regulations against stealing, murder, etc.!

Absurd, you say? Not really. You see, the Mosaic Law was merely a set of rules for children. A child needs constant supervision, instruction and discipline. A mother, for example, may take her five-year-old son to the grocery store and admonish him before entering that he is not to touch anything. But let's say that son is now an adult, and he comes back to visit his mother. What if the two of them should decide to stop at a grocery mart for some ice-cream. Can you picture the mother telling her adult son, "Now, Robert, don't touch anything!" A child must be treated like a child; a mature person like an adult.

When Paul says a Christian is no longer under the Law, then, he really means that a Christian should not have to be told at every turn how to behave. Sonship means maturity. It also means a higher level of "law"! While the Mosaic Law was done away with, a new law for sons came into existence: love. This is the moral character of God expressed in Jesus Christ. This is what should dictate a Christian's actions and attitudes!

Remember when Jesus said, "You have heard, but I say..."? He was trying to show that the play-pen was gone. In its place was a higher law, however, the Law of Christ. This law, in a sense, is much more difficult to keep than the law for children given at Mt. Sinai. Because it checks one's inward motivation, not merely his outward actions.

In Matthew 5:27, Jesus says, "Ye have heard that
it was said by them of old time (those under the Mosaic Law), Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you (the Law of Christ), That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." (KJV)

Just as the mature son did not need to have his mother tell him not to touch anything in the grocery store, the person who has accepted Jesus Christ should no longer have to be told that adultery, murder, fornication, stealing, etc., are not acceptable modes of behavior for the child of God. Indeed, the child of God, now guided by the law of love, should evidence the highest moral character of anyone in terms of his actions and attitudes towards others!

The Epistle to Diognetus captures the essence of those who live according to the Law of Christ:

"They (Christians) obey the prescribed laws and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives."\(^1\)

Albertus Pieters, in his book, The Seed of Abraham, describes the Decalogue as "elementary morality". \(^2\) Now some might be offended at such a comment, but Pieters defends his position by reassuring his audience that he has the highest awe and respect for the entire body of legislation given at Mt. Sinai. His point is this:
"To be guided by moral principle is... the state of a moral adult; to be told by way of commandment what he has to do is the state of a servant or child."

So what does Pieters do with the Law given at Mt. Sinai? Does he just toss it out the window? We will let him answer for himself. Pay close attention to his last statement!

"What, then, is the right use of the Ten Commandments? It is to look upon their contents as, for the most part, a limited and temporary formulation of universal moral principles, together with some things applicable to Israel alone. In themselves, and as they stand, they were intended for Israel only and but for a time. Since they constitute the covenant made at Sinai, they lost their legal force with the passing away of that covenant; but the moral principles contained therein are universal and immutable."

In summary, then, Pieters is suggesting that the Christian, with the new law of Christ written in his heart, not only will recognize the worth of elementary guidelines, but will far surpass these written regulations in his thoughts, his speech, his behavior and his entire manner of life.

Due to its importance, Paul's explanation of the relationship between Law and Grace is summarized below. References from Galatians are given for each of his five principles.
Paul's 5 principles re: Law & Grace


2. Galatians 3:15-18. The Law did not replace the Promise (grace).


2. Numbers 11:5


6. Ibid.


12. Pieters, p. 35.

13. Ibid., p. 34.
Due to their unusual character, it is often difficult for many to grasp the idea that the poetic books (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon) are in the same category as the Promise and the Law. That is, they are a record of God's speaking!

Now no one would question that it was definitely Jehovah who said to Abraham, "I will make of you a great nation." (Genesis 12:3). Likewise with the Law. The voice that thundered from Mt. Sinai was His. In both instances, God was speaking, and no one questions that!

But look at the poetic books. There are no attributions such as "God said" or "Thus saith the Lord". In fact, we find the complete opposite. Job 23:1, for example, gives this clear attribution:

"Then Job answered and said, Even today is my complaint bitter...."

Who is doing the talking above? God? The verse attributes the words to Job! Now here's the dilemma: Matthew Henry classifies the book of Job as doctrinal!
in nature. So do most Bible scholars and theologians. We have defined doctrine, using Bernard's understanding of the term, as "divine teaching, or truth as communicated by God." If Job is doctrinal—and it is!—then we must conclude that God has imparted the truths therein!

You might be asking yourself, "How can this be? Were not the psalms David's words, and Proverbs the philosophical musings of Solomon? We will answer that question by insisting that the voice of Jehovah can be heard in these utterances. In truth, God is speaking as clearly in the poetic books as He did in the Promise and the Law; the method is just different! We will better understand God's method of teaching here, however, if we first look at the need of His people.

**THE NEED**

With the exception of Job, the poetic books were written during the reigns of David and Solomon, when a true theocracy was in operation upon the earth! Israel had been given the Promise and the Law, but something more was needed at this hour. You see, in many ways, the Law was merely a collection of abstractions to the flock which stood at the foot of Mt. Sinai. Grace, too, was in danger of being merely theoretical. And that's why the poetic books are so precious!

The poetic books are a record of man experiencing God's grace and God's law in his daily life. It was not enough for God to place a code of ethics in one hand, and
and a pledge of enablement in the other; man had to experience for himself that the Christian life really works. He had to experience a practical outworking of the "I will--You shall" relationship. Let's give a simple illustration of this truth.

How many of you have ever put together a tricycle for a little child? That child will anxiously hover over you as you read the instructions (the law) for assembling that bike, and he may eagerly believe your ability to put the bike together for him (grace), but his moment of true joy will come only after he hops on his new vehicle and speeds away!

The poetic books came at a time when the people had both the Promise (grace) and the Law (instruction). So why did they need poetry? They needed it because grace and law will remain mere theology if not experienced both personally and practically in one's life. God's people needed to learn to apply the theology which had been handed down to them, to try it out in the arena of life itself!

The psalms, then, are the testimony of men who have put Law and Grace together--who have experienced their reality in daily episodes of life--and who shout, "It's true! It's true! All that God has said is true!" With that in mind, let's reconsider the poetic books and discover for ourselves what God is really saying in them.

In order to understand the content of the poetic
books, we need to examine their subject matter—to see what they talk about. A few samples will give us the basic content of the poetic books. Let's start with a look at the psalms:

PSALM 27:1 -- "The Lord is my light and my salvation."

PSALM 32:1 -- "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered!"

PSALM 46:1 -- "God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble."

PSALM 73:1 -- "Surely God is good to Israel, To those who are pure in heart!"

Do you see the basic testimony of the psalms? In brief, the psalmist is saying in all his writings, "I've found God to be like this; this is my experience with the godly walk." The content of the psalms, then, is simply a record of those who have experienced, inwardly or personally, the truths of God. It is here that we read where someone else has found God to be a refuge, a counsellor, a shepherd. It is here that we can identify with the testimony, "God is faithful" or "The Lord is near them who fear Him."

What about the other poetic books, such as Ecclesiastes? Well, let's look at some samples here, too:

ECCLESIASTES 1:14 -- "I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind."
ECCLESIASTES 2:13 — "And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness."

ECCLESIASTES 7:27 — "Behold, I have discovered this," says the Preacher.

Do you see what Ecclesiastes has in common with the psalms? This is a man crying out to the world, "This is what I have experienced; this is what I have found to be true in life!" Job, likewise, is a personal account of a godly man's bout with suffering and is also "part of the Old Testament Wisdom Literature which presents the simple, pious philosophizings of the Hebrew mind on practical godly living."³

Don't forget that Israel's need, once she had the Promise and Law in her possession, was for a practical outworking of these two bodies of doctrine. To that end, the book of Proverbs comes at just the right time, for it is "a library of moral and spiritual instruction for the young to insure a godly, happy life."⁴ It is, in short, applied theology.

Lastly, we come to Song of Solomon. There is no question that this is a personal record for many have blushed at its explicit intimacy. Regardless, God uses this magnificent poem to tell the joys of wedded love and to instruct His people to honor marriage. Have you ever wondered, then, if God is actually speaking in this Song, why He didn't just say, "Thou shalt honor marriage!" or "Thou shalt find thy wife attractive!?"

Ah, friends, He spoke through poetry--through the personal experiences of men--because this was a method preciously suited to the occasion!
When God speaks, He always uses a method adapted to the need. When He called Abraham from a secure environment, and asked the lone sojourner to trust Him as the God who guides even in uncertainty, He spoke to Abraham as a friend would speak to a friend. Do you see how appropriate—and necessary!—this method was?

Then, when Israel stood amassed at the foot of Mt. Sinai, God laid down the law for how they were to live, function, and relate to one another in Canaan. They needed an authoritative word from God because, prior to this moment, the only "law" they knew was that of Egypt. Without some new guidelines, life in Canaan would have been chaotic. History has proven that man will ignore laws that have no authority behind them, so God employed thunder, lightning and other physical manifestations to communicate His right to govern His people.

In the poetic books, God speaks through man's personal experience. That is, God teaches us theology through our own personal experiences! Let us illustrate this principle by looking at Psalm 23.

Everyone is familiar with the first line of Psalm 23. It says, "The Lord is my shepherd." Now watch! When you open your Bible to this comforting psalm, do you read it and say to yourself, "Isn't that wonderful! The Lord is David's shepherd. I'm glad." No, no. Most probably, you will personalize the truth therein for yourself. Yes, the Lord may have been a
Shepherd to David, but the important thing is that the Lord is your shepherd! That's why the psalms minister so richly to us. While we acknowledge that David may have penned a majority of the psalms, we are saying in our own heart, "I could have written these, because I have found these things to be true in my own experience."

Poetry is the language of the heart, and that is why it is such an excellent method of communication. You see, God could have given us the basic content of Psalm 23 without using poetry nor a man's experience. He could have said, "I am your Shepherd, you shall not want!" The truth would have been the same as "The Lord is my Shepherd", but it would be missing that vital element which makes the psalms a pool of refreshing for those who desire to walk in God's way.

When we go to the poetic books, we not only find someone else who has found such-and-so to be true, we can lend a hearty "Amen!" to their testimony because we have found the same to be true in our own lives.

Harvey H. Guthrie, Jr. explains why poetry is so indispensible when communicating one's heart experience in relationship to God's truth:

"Those books of the Old Testament which are not narrative--the Psalter, Job, and Proverbs--are, for the most part, poetry. This is so because in these pages the writers are bearing witness to the One who, they are convinced, has been at work in the life that is theirs in memory and experience. This poetry is the response inspired by the One men found present and active in concrete events of history, and its form as poetry is dictated by that to...whom...it is bearing witness."
Guthrie concludes, therefore, that:

"Poetry does justice to living beings and living relationships in a way that bare abstract definition cannot."  

Adolph Saphir also lauds the style God employs in communicating this particular body of doctrine. Selecting Psalm 23 as an example of the Bible's superior style, Saphir asks:

"Did you ever think of the 23rd Psalm—six short verses a compendium of all human life—a little nightingale that has gone through all the countries of the earth pouring forth its inimitable melody, thrilling the heart and bringing peace and consolation to the soul? Do you think that all the poets in the world, if they were working for ever so many years, could produce six such verses? How wonderful is the style of the Bible!"

God's three methods of speaking thus far are depicted below. Note how they fit the content being delivered and the need:

**THE PROMISE:**

![FRIEND TO FRIEND](image1)

**THE LAW:**

![AUTHORITATIVELY](image2)

**THE POETIC BOOKS:**

![MAN'S INNER SELF](image3)
The poetic books deal with the inner experiences of men. When we read them, therefore, it is just as though God is saying, "Look! This is what you can experience, too!" When David says, "The Lord is my Shepherd", God desires that we personalize that truth. That is, God wants us to make it our own, to experience it for ourselves.

Who was the first one to say, "God is our refuge and strength"? Yes, it was David (Psalm 46:1), but, look, have you ever said that? Have you ever told someone else that God brought you up out of the miry clay? Where did you get that testimony? From David? Or from your own personal experience? Do you see what a wonder the poetic books are when it comes to response? We can make the words therein our own—and give them back to God!

The poetic books are personalized theology. God could have said, "You shall be happy when your sins are forgiven", but, instead, He lets us exclaim from the heart the words which David found true in his own experience: "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered!" (Psalm 32:1)

And that's not all. When we go through trials, we can say with Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I love Him!" When we are depressed, we can ask, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? (KJV)" When we are in love, we can exalt in this, that "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." In truth, there isn't one aspect of life that the poetic books do not touch upon! We will not experience anything contrary to what Old Test-
ament saints found to be true regarding God's grace and His Law! They have left us the precious testimony that nothing surpasses the life of faith; that God is faithful to His Word; that keeping God's commandments makes for a happy life! But it's not just their testimony; it is likewise our own—or can be.

David could exult in the Law because he didn't see the Law as some awesome regulation written on stone tablets. The Law was written in his heart. That is, David could personally testify that the Law was accomplishing a work of grace in his life, "converting the soul, making wise the simple, rejoicing the heart, enlightening the eyes" (Psalm 19:7-8)! And that's exactly how God wants grace and law to be in our experience.

Now watch! Have you ever imagined someone setting our traffic laws to music? Do you realize that David set God's laws to music?! When law and grace operate harmoniously, they make for a happy person. Hence, even today, we find the Law, not coming down to us from Mt. Sinai, with smoke and thunderings, but it comes in poetry—to be cross-stitched and hung on the wall!

The person who sees the Law this way—so beautiful it needs to be embroidered—has realized that grace and law are not in conflict; that they can be worked out practically in the Christian walk. And Christians today ARE under law! Christ commands (that's law!) us to love one another, to pray without ceasing, to rejoice always! He's commanded us not to let the sun go down
on our anger, and to consider the lillies of the field when we think God is not concerned about our physical welfare. If you have ever emblazoned these commands on plaques or embroidered them for a friend, you have given testimony to the fact that practical Christian living is a reality, not merely an abstract ideal.

That's the response God wanted from Israel. He wanted His people to enjoy life and to delight in His precepts as much as they delighted in His grace. And as for us, God wants us to make the psalmist's response our response. He wants us to reiterate the testimonies of praise, deliverance, help, encouragement, solace, joy and faith—not because someone else said them—but because God has told us that this can be expected in our own experience!

The progress found in the poetic books is more in terms of sequence than content. That is, you can't have a record of man's experience with grace and law until you first have the Promise and the Law! The poetic books could not have come at the beginning of God's redemptive program. Rather, they logically follow the body of revelation spoken to Abraham, and the doctrine imparted to Moses on Mt. Sinai.


4Ibid., p. 291.

5Harvey H. Guthrie, Jr., God and History In the Old Testament (Greenwich, Conn.: The Seabury Press, 1960), p. 8.

6Ibid., p. 9.

We come now to one of the most critical portions of Scripture wherein God speaks—the prophetic books. These tear-stained pages not only contain the most extensive address to God's people on record, but they also include the most urgent and pathetic utterances ever spoken by Jehovah!

The drawing below locates where the prophetic books fall in relationship to God's historical activities upon earth. They come at a time when Israel, having forsaken the God who made her a glorious kingdom, is plummeting to total ruin through her compulsive idolatry and recalcitrant actions.
Unlike Genesis 12:1-3, where God so delights in His eternal plan that He speaks His whole desire in one cascading breath, the prophetic books picture a God in torment, a dejected Husband whose intermittent sobs tell the difficulty of His message.

**THE NEED**

What need could possible warrant more than 200 pages of God's attention in the Biblical record? We have already alluded to the crisis which Jehovah addresses through the prophets. It is simply this: God had entered into an exclusive, intimate relationship with Israel, and now the nation has turned away from Him.

The prophetic books, in reality, constitute a diary—a sober, disturbing one—of a marriage gone sour. They picture the desolation of divorce—from God's perspective—and lay bare the delicate sensitivity of the heart of our God. It is a picture both incredibly sublime and unforgettably solemn.

We need to remember how important relationships are to God in order to enter into His sufferings here. Several aspects of relationship were threatened by Israel's disdain for the holy. As we listen to the Husband's side of this bewildering story, remember that the indictments made below were not delivered without acute agony on God's part. He Himself testifies that His heart was turned within Him—that His compassions were set on fire (Hosea 11:8)—as He faced
the reality of Israel's estrangement. Nevertheless, even God's immeasurable pity could not forbear Israel's transgressions in such intimate realms as these:

Her continuing revolt threatened a paternal relationship:

**Isaiah 1:2**

"Listen, 0 heavens, and hear, 0 earth; For the Lord speaks:
Sons I have reared and brought up,
But they have revolted against Me."

Her defiance marred a highly personal and redemptive relationship between her and Jehovah:

**Jeremiah 13:11**

"For as the waistband clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole household of Israel and the whole household of Judah cling to Me', declares the Lord, 'that they might be for Me a people, for renown, for praise, and for glory; but they did not listen.'"

Finally, her repeated infidelity played havoc with the ultimate relationship, marriage:

**Hosea 9:1**

"Do not rejoice, 0 Israel...For you have played the harlot, forsaking your God."
How did Israel's unfaithfulness affect the Living God? We have already noted that the bulk of the Old Testament revelation addresses this crisis, but Jeremiah reveals the extreme limits of God's pathos. This sorrow-worn prophet tells us that God was so anxious to resolve this rift that it was the first thing on His mind in the morning! Jeremiah records no less than eleven times the fact that Jehovah rose up early to try and reason with His people!

Jeremiah 7:13

"I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear."
(See also: Jeremiah 7:25; 11:7; 25:3; 25:4; 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:14; 35:15; and 44:41)

While the above language is figurative, who can callously dismiss the picture of a God so desirous of communication with His people that He can hardly wait until daybreak to speak? Oh, that we were so committed to reconciliation!

What were Jehovah's pleadings like? While commentators stress the courtroom dramatization found in Isaiah, it should be remembered that this scene does not occur before the Husband wearies Himself with apologetic sessions and vulnerable inquiries that unveil a responsively frigid Israel:
Micah 6:3

"My people, what have I done to you, 
And how have I wearied you? Answer Me."

Malachi 1:2

"'I have loved you,' says the Lord. But 
you say, 'How hast Thou loved us?'"

In light of Israel's obstinancy and ingratitude, who can fathom the long-suffering of the Lord in this matter? (Long-suffering could be defined as patience demonstrated at one's own expense for the benefit of another). We shall now turn to the content of the prophetic books, to see how God addresses Israel's most critical need, and what His solution tells us about His character.

We have likened the relationship between God and Israel to a marital relationship. In the beginning, the couple seemed happily married. Indeed, Ezekiel 16:8ff records the great love story of the Bible:
When I passed by and saw you again, you were old enough for marriage; and I wrapped my cloak around you to legally declare my marriage vow. I signed a covenant with you, and you became mine. Then, when the marriage had taken place, I gave you beautiful clothes of linens and silk, embroidered, and sandals made of dolphin hide. I gave you lovely ornaments, bracelets and beautiful necklaces...and a lovely tiara for your head....Your reputation was great among the nations for your beauty; it was perfect because of all the gifts I gave you, says the Lord God."

(Ah, did you catch the high-point of this relationship, dear friends? It came when God had established Israel as a glorious kingdom, a pure theocracy! The Queen of Sheba, you will recall, fainted inwardly when she saw the lavish outworkings of God's love for Israel! (See 1 Kings 10:5 and 2 Chronicles 9:4).

Oh, that Israel had continued in such blissful love, but the relationship falters, engulfing the faithful Husband with pangs of humiliation:
"You thought you could get along without me—you trusted in your beauty instead; and you gave yourself as a prostitute to every man who came along. Your beauty was for his asking. You used the lovely things I gave you for making idol shrines and to decorate your bed of prostitution. Unbelievable! There has never been anything like it before! (Ezekiel 16:15-16. Living Bible.)

What do you suppose happens when a relationship goes awry? Any relationship? Usually the two people involved will seek out answers to two vital questions:

1. What went wrong with the relationship?

2. Is there any hope for reconciliation?

Practically all the prophets deal with these two monumental issues. Something has gone wrong in the relationship between God and Israel and like any marriage counselor today, the prophets want to set forth the problem (What caused it? Whose fault is it?), as well as find a solution.

First, God speaks about the problems of the broken relationship: what caused it, its consequences and its resolution. He gets at the core of the problem in a very unusual way. Rather than nailing Israel to the wall for her obvious apostasy, God makes Himself completely vulnerable by saying,
"LOOK AT ME; HAVE I FAILED?"

Jehovah invites Israel to find fault in Him! Have you ever heard of a counseling session in which the husband, rather than pelting the air with all his wife's shortcomings, wants first to hear her side of the story regarding his faithfulness in the responsibilities of the relationship?! This is incredible behavior!

And, whew, keep your eye on those places in Scripture where God says, "Look at Me!", because this is where you will find the greatest revelation of God's immutable character and glorious Person! In Isaiah 40:12-18, for example, we find what Merrill F. Unger defines as "every glory of our Lord: His deity, eternity, preexistence, creatorship, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, (and) incomparableness"! 

* LOOK AT ME!

While Israel's prophets were rugged reformers, divinely raised up to call the nation from sin and
and idolatry in its periods of decline, it must also be remembered that they were the instruments through whom God disclosed every aspect of His incomprehensible nature! If you want to know your God, study the prophets!

Well, what happened when God told Israel, "Look at Me! Tell Me if I am at fault!"? What happened is that God was vindicated; He was found a faithful Husband. If the problem wasn't God, then who was it? Micah 6:2 makes it clear that the Lord has a case against His people; Israel, not God, is the guilty party! She has committed an abomination before the Lord and has slandered His wonderful faithfulness by going after other gods. She has profaned Jehovah's perfect love by her rampant adultery and has esteemed groves and wood stumps more precious than the Living God!

Surely, there is a need for a word from God here! This is not Israel merely stumbling; it is the redemptive operation of God tottering on its last leg! Remember that Israel was God's redemptive channel; He has no other channel to work through apart from Israel! As God says in Amos 3:2 --

"You only have I known of all the families of the earth."

God had chosen the seed of Abraham to bring salvation to all the nations of the world, and now she was walking away from her mission, counting it as nothing!
God could not sit idly by; the prophets are a record of God disciplining His erring children. As Unger suggests, "They thundered forth warnings of impending doom in the centuries preceding the fall of Israel in 722 B.C. and the fall of Judah in 586 B.C."  

Note the duration of Jehovah's long-suffering in the above statement: "centuries"! When we studied the destruction of the nation in Part 1, we noted that Jehovah's pleadings with Israel and Judah were not infrequent, nor were they spoken without an internal agony that stretched the forbearance of God. It was difficult for Jehovah to announce His inevitable judgment against "the dearly beloved of His soul" (Jeremiah 12:7, KJV). Those who doubt it should read passages such as Hosea 11:8 or Jeremiah 31:20, both of which appear below:

**Hosea 11:8**

"How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel?"

**Jeremiah 31:20**

"Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a delightful child? Indeed, as often as I have spoken against him, I certainly still remember him; Therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him," declares the Lord.

We can see from the above passages that although Jehovah must discipline Israel for her sin (sin does
have consequences!), yet He follows His chastening with comforting mercy! Yes, God takes Israel to the woodshed, and we definitely hear the "Wham! Wham! Wham!" of His rod of judgment, but when the smarting subsides, and the last tear is dried, there are words of hope.

There are words of hope because God is not only concerned with broken relationships (the problem); He is also concerned with reconciliation (the solution). After pin-pointing the difficult areas in a marriage, the counselor will often confront a couple with a very necessary question: Do you think there is any future for your relationship now that we have uncovered the source of your troubles?

When God brought the malicious Chaldeans upon Israel (see Habakkuk), and allowed Babylon to carry Judah into exile, the people of God probably thought there was no hope for the future. They probably thought their covenant-relationship with the Living God was over. But Jeremiah, along with all but three of the Old Testament prophets, calms Israel's fears with these reassuring words:

**Jeremiah 29:11**

"I know the plans that I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope."

In short, God testifies through the prophets that there is hope for His marriage with Israel; they
can—and will—have a glorious future together! Hosea, in particular, testifies of the reunion between God and Israel:

Hosea 2:18,19

"In that day...I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, In lovingkindness and in compassion, And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. Then you will know the Lord."

In essence, the content of the prophets can be divided according to the terms "this day" and "that day". Judgments and warnings permeate the utterances directed at Israel's sin ("this day"), while words of hope and comfort are projected for the future date ("that day") when the fallen Theocracy will be restored and God's relationship with Israel is fully mended.

Matthew Henry, commenting on the contents of Isaiah's prophecy, makes this observation:

"The beginning of this book (Isaiah) abounds most with reproofs for sin and threatenings of judgment; the latter end of it is full of good words and comfortable words. This method the Spirit of Christ took formerly in the prophets and does still, first to convince and then to comfort; and those that would be blessed with the comforts must submit to the convictions."
Henry is illustrating what Alfred Edersheim has said about God's dealings: that they are never exclusively punitive. The history of God's chosen nation certainly verifies that incredible truth.

In retrospect, then, the content of the prophets deals with two aspects of the rift between God and Israel: 1. The Problem, and 2. The Prospect of Reconciliation; and, then, the present historical situation (Israel's sin) and Israel's future in God's plans.

THE METHOD

When you consider the fact that God is addressing rebels in the prophetic books, it is a wonder that He doesn't revert back to His commanding tactics at Mt. Sinai to startle the offenders.

You will remember, though, that the people had asked Moses to ask God never to speak that way again, it frightened them so. And God honored their request! His words would no longer resound from a smoking mountain; instead, He would put His words in the mouth of a man! Hobart E. Freeman explains:

"The divine origin of the prophetic institution is set forth by Moses...in Deuteronomy 18:9-22. Moses...declared in this passage that there was to be an institution of prophets raised up who would declare the messages of God, and that this office would one day culminate in one great Prophet like unto himself."
Matthew Henry sees the prophetic institution as a vital need in Israel. He comments:

"Besides the priests and Levites, their ordinary ministers, whose office it was to teach Jacob God's law, (Israel) should have prophets, extraordinary ministers, to reprove them for their faults, remind them of their duty, and foretell things to come, judgments for warning and deliverances for their comfort." 7

Freeman touches on the unique aspect of the prophet's role. These men did not pretend to guide Israel through their own wisdom and intuition. Canaan, for example, had its own religious institutions and heathen soothsayers, but God declares in Deuteronomy 18:15-22 that:

"Israel will learn the things she needs to know, not by discovery through the methods of divination and occult practices, but by revelation. Furthermore, the means of revelation, which would come unsought at the sovereign discretion of Yahweh, was to be by the word of His prophets through whom God would speak and make known His will." 8

C. Von Orelli makes this blunt, yet accurate statement, regarding God's prophet:

"His words are not the production of his own spirit, but come from a higher source." 9
In short, God's method of speaking here is simply this: the words of God become incarnate in the words of a man. In Israel's case, God chose to speak to His people through a man who was living on their own level, and yet with God's authority. The prophet was someone they could both relate to and heed.

Whenever God speaks as He did to Israel—to warn, to bring into account, to indict for sin—two very necessary actions are required. The first response needed is confession. One must acknowledge his wrong and agree with God that His holy standard has not been observed in action nor in heart. Secondly, there must be repentance. Repentance is the pivot upon which true reconciliation is effected. Confession admits, "I've gone off in the wrong direction, God", while repentance demonstrates the fact, "Lord, I am turning around; I'm coming back!" Israel not only needed to face up to her sin, she needed to do a complete aboutface.
THE CONSEQUENCES

We feel a word should be said here regarding the consequences of not heeding God's voice of warning. As we have said before, Jehovah does not engage in idle talk; when He speaks, it is for a reason. Since the prophetic books contain the largest body of doctrine in Scripture, especially in terms of God speaking extensively, it behooves us to pay special heed to this message. Israel saw no urgency or reality in God's warnings, and so she continued in her sin of unbelief and rebellion. And God rained judgment upon her complacency!

God did not slap her wrists and say, "Naughty, naughty"; He walloped her good! Not only did Jehovah destroy the nation; He sent her into captivity and removed from Israel every single vestige of her redemptive role upon Planet Earth!

2. Ibid., p. 303.

3. Ibid.


8. Freeman, p. 25.

How can we, who are so familiar with Jesus' words, who have rehearsed the songs of angels at his birth, who have memorized and savored voices and sounds of a distant age as an actor familiarizes himself with every line of a play; how can we hear afresh the words of a Father who peels back the realms of heaven to say, "This is My beloved Son, Hear ye Him"?

It has been our intent thus far to examine those bodies of revelation in which God has spoken extensively, but how can we really comprehend the great gulf between the Old Testament and New Testament when the turning of one single page puts us into a brand new revelation? Dear friends, it was not so for those First Century Christians. As we read the last verse of Malachi and immediately turn to the Gospel of Matthew, it is difficult for us to imagine that God has not spoken to His people for a period of 400 years!

Many have called this prolonged break in divine revelation "The Four Hundred Silent Years". Indeed, although God did not communicate with His people during this time, it should be kept in mind that His silence did not issue out of sullenness nor an attitude of "I'm not speaking to you ever again!" We know from history that divine preparations continued even through this silent era.
When we come to the New Testament pages today and desire to capture the true atmosphere the Divine Voice penetrated at this hour, we must picture a people wondering at God's silence and longing for His audible presence. Perhaps you yourself have experienced a prolonged break in communion with a very special friend, and know the joy that attends getting in touch again, having gaps filled in, notions expanded or confirmed and that life—of which you had only shadowy insight—brought into full and glorious light before you. If you have ever experienced this, perhaps then you can read Hebrews 1:1-2 with new unction:

Hebrews 1:1-2 is really a bulletin heralding the sound of God's voice after so many years of silence, and we need to hear the writer's bursting excitement. It is as if he is shouting to the world, "Extra! Extra! Read all about it! The silence is broken; God has spoken to us again!"

The writer of Hebrews 1:1-2 not only celebrates the silence-breaking voice of God, but, also, the superi-
ority of the revelation. We need to keep in mind that God's last word to man in the Old Testament focused on a coming redeemer. The "Messianic flashes" that we find in the book of Malachi stimulated the expectations of God's people during the 400 silent years and set their hope upon that momentous event yet to come.

Indeed, the heightened anticipation and the lack of detail regarding the outworking of this momentous event necessitated a further word from God. We need to be careful, however, not to view this revelation as just another time in history in which God has taken the initiative to speak. Indeed, as the author of Hebrews 1:1-2 so keenly observes, God's past revelations had been too infrequent, too sporadic, and too partial to really satisfy man's growing need to know God and His ways more fully; a final, all-comprehensive word was necessary, and such is the need the Gospel revelation addresses!

PAST REVELATION:

* infrequent
* occasional
* fragmentary

Whenever God has spoken extensively before, we noted that His message geared itself to the need of the hour; God never rambles nor engages in idle talk. One begins to sense the magnitude of what God is about to say at the beginning of the New Testament age when he realizes that God has judged all previous modes of revelation—
dreams, visions, audible voice, theophany, angels, men—as inadequate vehicles for this next and most supreme conference between Himself and humanity! We turn now to the method with which God discloses His plans and Personhood with perfect exactness.

**THE METHOD**

Many of us can recall various ways in which different people have responded to us in our own time of need. Perhaps a bouquet of flowers, a box of candy, a letter or a phone call was sufficient to minister to us in that critical hour. Throughout this study, we have tried to establish the importance of selecting the right mode of expression when addressing a need, but we herein confess that no method can compare with the one God uses here in the Gospel record! Look at it afresh:

How incredible! The Word became flesh. Do you yet marvel at such an awesome fact? In ages past, God used various methods for arresting the attention of His audience, but here He becomes a man Himself in order to
demonstrate and speak His truth to all men (John 1:14-18).

According to Hebrews 1:1-2, God has chosen to personally visit earth (in the Son), letting us behold, not glimpses of truth, but total, revealed Glory.


---Hebrews 1:1-2
(Phillips)

A pictorial review of the methods God has used heretofore will help us to focus on the superiority of this final and thorough revelation:

**GOD SPEAKS:**

**METHOD:**

**APPROPRIATENESS:**

God speaks to Abraham as a friend would speak to a friend. The new pilgrim needs a trust relationship with his newly revealed Captain

God communicates His authority through awesome natural phenomenon and thus secures the peoples' respect and loyalty
Poetry is an external record of an internal experience. God desires that we make His truths our own through personal experience.

God honors the request made at Sinai by putting His words into the mouth of a man who is on the people's own level.

God speaks His mind to men by becoming a man Himself! All that one might want to know about God is revealed in Jesus.

F.F. Bruce discloses the reason why Jehovah is so excited about this last method and the presentation of His Son:

"Priest and prophet, sage and singer were in their several ways His spokesmen; yet all the successive acts and varying modes of revelation in the ages before Christ came did not add up to the fulness of what God had to say."

What a beautiful truth: Jesus is the fulness of what God has to say to mankind! He expresses the plans and Personhood of the Father with exacting perfection. All that mankind could ever hope to know about God is
revealed clearly in the work and person of His Son "in whom dwells the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9)
The Living Bible says, "For in Christ there is all of God in a human body!"

JESUS

* the fulness of what God has to say
* all of God in a human body

Merrill C. Tenney, in his commentary on the Gospel of John, states that man has always longed for a tangible God. He says, however, that man has satisfied this craving with imperfect portrayals or imperfect concepts of God. Tenney finds the Incarnation quite astounding in that God, acknowledging that the need of man still remains, has condescended to satisfy it! That is, "The eternal Son, who is the radience of God's glory and the impress of His essential being, has expressed the person of God in human flesh."⁴

Here, too, is an incredible thing: God wants so much to satisfy our longing to know Him in a tangible way that He employs a literary device found nowhere else in Scripture except in the Four Gospels! Have you ever wondered why there are four records of the life of Jesus Christ? Why not just one? It seems that God wants us to have such a clear picture of Himself that He gives us, not one, but four records of His work and personhood via the life of His Beloved Son! Obviously, God doesn't want us to miss this picture of Himself and its four-fold
emphasize. Picture God, realizing man's great need to know Him more fully, crying out four distinct times, "This is Me!" The Four Gospels are an invitation to "Behold your God" (Isaiah 40:9).

Remember:

Scripture does not record the life of Abraham four times, nor the life of Elijah; only Jesus. This is a unique literary device found only once in the entire Bible.

Merrill F. Unger views the four-fold record of the Gospels as "four different poses of one unique personality." He sees them as portraits of the person and work of the long-promised Messiah and the world's Saviour. We've already suggested that God wants us to see Himself in this four-fold record, but what else might necessitate this unique presentation?

What is the need for this?
Have you ever considered Jesus' method of teaching throughout the Gospels? He doesn't gather His disciples around Him to present "Theology 101", now does He? How, then, does He communicate God's truth to us? May we suggest that we have four views of the Son of God because Jesus is to be our example; we need to see the truth modeled before our eyes, and that's exactly what we have in the Gospel record!

"If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done unto you."

—John 13:14-15

The Gospels, then, give us a picture of what God did; they are a factual record of selected deeds and occasions in the life of Jesus. In addition to giving us a record of Jesus' life, death, burial and resurrection, they also show us the truth modeled.

= THE TRUTH MODELED

This method—God becoming man and modeling truth before our eyes—is truly one of the greater aspects of Redemption's story!
THE CONTENT OF THE GOSPELS

Jesus taught by example and, in so doing, modeled the truth of God for us. His method or way of teaching has given men a clear understanding of God's expectations, but we need now to focus on what He was trying to teach through these various demonstrations. Generally speaking, "the Gospel" is considered to be those facts surrounding the life, death, burial and resurrection of our Lord. There are, however, some other very specific topics found in this "Good News".

A WONDERFUL PERSON

Without question, the four Gospels present to us a very wonderful Person; the Person of Jesus Christ. Some might think that a rather obvious fact, but we should like to echo the words of Thomas Dehanye Bernard here. Bernard insisted that Christianity is neither a creed nor a set of rules, but, rather, a Person. Bernard believed that God was determined we should get to know Him as a Person first, and that's why the Four Gospels precede the great theological bodies found in the Epistles. 

See the Person..........and then His theology!
Few would argue, then, that the basic content of the four Gospels is the presentation of a Person. On the other hand, do not the words Jesus spoke—the things He taught—also make up the content of the Gospel? Most certainly! In fact, two very basic themes run through most of Jesus' teaching, although many Christians perhaps never see the two topics as clear-cut as we are going to present them.

THE BEATITUDES

While most of Jesus' teaching in the Gospels is active, there are a few rare occasions where He does speak at length. One such occasion is found in Matthew 5-7, that portion of Scripture which has come to be known as "The Beatitudes" or "The Sermon on the Mount". Indeed, there are probably many who can quote these chapters at length, and yet miss what Jesus is really talking about. Look at the content of that message!

"And seeing the multitudes, (Jesus) went up into a mountain...and He opened His mouth, and taught (His disciples), saying,

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven...."

Do you know what Jesus is teaching in this entire sermon? Could you summarize it in one word? Look at another verse:
"And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee."

—Matthew 5:30

Could we say that Jesus is telling a believer how he ought to act here? And could we suggest that His primary teaching in the Beatitudes is that a Christian should be poor in spirit, meek, righteous, pure in heart? In fact, might we say that Jesus is really issuing a command to "Be poor in spirit!"? Think back to Mt. Sinai and the definition we gave for when one person tells another person what to do. Could it be that this beautiful, lofty prose is actually...Law?

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

* Thou shalt be merciful!
* Thou shalt let thy light shine!
* Thou shalt not lust in your heart!
* Thou shalt love thine enemies!
* Thou shalt be perfect!

Do you find it strange that Jesus would be teaching law? Ah, friend, consider His own testimony in that regard:
"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill."

--Matthew 5:17

One of Jesus' prime missions while on earth was to elevate the law and restore its true interpretation. Many confrontations with the Jews, in fact, were over issues of law. Even in the New Testament epistles, the misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the law by the First Century Jews fostered Paul's climatic treatise in Romans and also instigated hot debates in the early church councils. Law was not a dead topic in Jesus' day.

Indeed, Jesus' raised the law to new dimensions when He told the crowd gathered on the mount, "Ye have heard...but I say." He challenged His followers to go beyond outward conformity and to check their attitudes as well as their actions. That early Christians took His message to heart is evidenced from a statement in "The Epistle to Diognetus":

"They (Christians) obey the prescribed laws and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives."8

Maybe you have never associated the Gospel content with law before, but almost everything that Jesus said and demonstrated in His earthly walk was to give a clearer picture of true righteousness. He was the
summation and perfecter of God's holy standard. Yes, the Gospels are primarily about law! Jesus' life not only clarified righteousness from God's perspective, it also showed man he was not able to attain such a precious standard.

**ANOTHER ASPECT OF CONTENT**

We have said that the Gospels are, in great measure, historical narrative. Bernard calls the detailing of Jesus' life, death, burial and resurrection "the Gospel as fact". This historical, factual aspect of the Gospel, of course, is the foundation of the "Good News" and is also that aspect of the content with which we are most familiar.

**The Gospel as fact:**

As we have already seen from looking at the Sermon on the Mount, there are some portions in the four-fold Gospel in which it says, "And Jesus opened His mouth, saying...". Bernard calls these words of Jesus--the words He taught and spoke from the time of His baptism onward--"the Gospel as doctrine."
Bernard feels that Jesus' teaching—His doctrine—is as much an integral part of "the" Gospel as is the history of what Jesus did. Truly, the Gospels themselves honor Jesus' words. John 7:46 says, "Never man spake like this man!" We have already stated that much of Jesus' teaching focused around clarifying and elevating the Law; that, truly, is one aspect of His doctrinal content. We should, however, like to look at another topic of which He spoke frequently. It is found in another of His well-known discourses which He spoke in the Upper Room (John 13-17) just prior to His treacherous trial and subsequent crucifixion. Look at His topic:

"If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it."

--John 14:14

Hmmm. That differs significantly from the content found in the Sermon on the Mount, doesn't it? Was Jesus talking about law in the Upper Room Discourse? Listen to another wonderful verse:
"I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

--John 15:5

Ah, this is NOT law, dear friends! Look at the content one more time:

"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

--John 15:7

Oh, do you see it? Jesus declares throughout this discourse, "I will do it", "It shall be done unto you", "You need Me to accomplish this"! Do you remember the theological term we used in an earlier section to describe what it is when God does something on our behalf? Have you ever heard the following term:

GRACE!

Hallelujah! Jesus not only raised the law, dear Christian, He also raised grace! The righteousness we could not attain on our own, He imputed to us through
grace. Scripture tells us that we are saved by grace; God has accomplished our salvation, not we ourselves. Oh, where would we be if the grace of God were not even now operating in our lives?

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father."

--John 14:12

From the historical side, then, the content of the Gospels center around a dynamic and unique Person: the Son of God. The content of His doctrine, however, focuses on the great theological themes of law and grace, but raised to new heights than before. Therefore, the Gospels introduce a Person who not only teaches superior principles for living, but who also equips the believer with the power to live out that life before men.

**PROGRESS IN THE GOSPELS**

Biblical scholars have long recognized that the Gospel of John stands apart from the other Gospels in its basic content. That is, a definite advance can be seen between the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), and the Fourth Gospel of the Beloved Disciple. (The term "synoptic" means "same view".)

In essence, the Synoptic Gospels all present
Jesus as a man, living out His life in "outwardly, public, Galilean, earthly scenarios." In the Synoptics, Christ is presented in an official capacity and in full view of public scrutiny. It is not until the Gospel of John that you enter into the "inward, private, heavenly aspects of the God-man." The illustration below simplifies the progression found between the Synoptics and John's Gospel in this regard:

\[\text{Synoptic Gospels} \quad \text{John}\]

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

Jesus = man! Jesus = God!

So, too, one can see progress between the Synoptics and the Gospel of John in terms of audience. The Synoptics address themselves to three distinct communities, whereas the Fourth Gospel directs itself to the whole world:
Not only did the Gospel writers address a particular audience, they also presented a portrait of Jesus that would most appeal to their specific community. Thus, Matthew presents the Jews with a Messiah-King; Mark shows the industrious Romans that Jesus was action-oriented; and Luke satisfies the Greeks that Jesus was an ordinary man not removed from nitty-gritty life experiences. John offers the climax to all these views by saying, "Yes, Jesus is Israel's Messiah, and, yes, He's a worker, and, true, He seems so much like us, but....He's God!"

**PROGRESS BETWEEN THE GOSPELS AND NT**

It has been our thesis that Scripture holds together because of the connective relationships between its various parts. That is, no verse, no section, no individual book stands alone; it must be viewed in relationship to the whole scheme of Scripture. Thus, while we have marked a unity and progress within the four Gospels themselves, we must also see how the Gospels relate to the rest of Scripture.

It is not difficult to immediately recognize the connective role the book of Matthew serves in terms of the Old and New Testament canon. As Bernard notes:

"The record of St. Matthew, ever recognized as the Hebrew Gospel, is the true commencement of the New Testament, showing how it grows out of the Old, and presenting the manifestation of the Son of God, not as a detached phenomenon, but as the pre-destined completion of the long course of historic dispensations."
Likewise, the Gospel of John—dazzling the eye with its vivid, heavenly perspective on the life and work of Jesus—is a most suitable prelude to the lofty doctrine of the Epistles. So it is that the Gospels nestle themselves comfortably between the Old Testament and the Epistles!

A MORE INTIMATE UNITY

We believe there is a more strategic relationship between the Gospels and the Epistles than what we have named so far. That is, something in the Gospel records themselves link Matthew, Mark, Luke and John with the rest of the New Testament. Nor is it a subtle unity of which we speak, for the Gospels all announce their own incompleteness and direct us to the Epistles for a more sure word.

Let us get to the point. If you examine the prefatory remarks of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, you will notice a very unusual admission. For example, Luke, writing in the book of Acts, clearly states that his Gospel contained only the beginning of what Jesus and His ministry were all about. John, too, admits that his record is highly selective; that it would be a voluminous, if not impossible, task to record all that Jesus said and did in His earthly ministry (John 21:25). Mark, likewise, opens his gospel with this amazing sub-head: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God"!

If, then, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John only give
us the beginning of the Gospel, wherein might we find the conclusion? Bernard suggests that the Epistles complete the Gospel message. He bases this on the fact that the four-fold Gospel, although it gives us the Person of Jesus Christ, nevertheless gives no theological explanation of the life and work of Jesus!\textsuperscript{15}

Unger, too, suggests that the accomplishment of the four Gospels is that they introduce us to Jesus\textsuperscript{16}, but he is quick to add that they are "designedly incomplete as a story".\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{A LITERARY MIRACLE}

Granted, the four Gospels give us the pertinent details of the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, but they DO NOT list the significance of these events! Look at Luke 2:7, for example. The physician is detailing the birth of the Son of God here, but he writes as if John Doe were being born! There is absolutely no theological comment in this vignette!

"And (Mary) brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger..."

\textit{--Luke 2:7}

We echo Bernard's sentiments when he says, "No
literary fact is more remarkable than that men, knowing what these writers knew, and feeling what they felt, should have given us chronicles so plain and calm. Luke, mind you, penned the words regarding Jesus' birth around A.D. 58; without question, he knew all the ramifications of the Incarnation, yet restrains his hand from elaborating!

Do you know what the book of Revelation says about this same scene? Revelation 12:5 records the manger scene thusly:

"And the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born."

When, dear reader, was the last time you saw a nativity scene with a dragon ready to devour the baby Jesus? What is going on here?

Look, too, at Matthew 27:33ff in which the writer tells of the crucifixion and the casting of lots for Jesus' garments. Do you know how much Matthew says about the crucifixion?

"And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots."

--Matthew 27:35

Was Matthew recording an incidental historical
event? Paul says it was God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself! (2 Corinthians 5:19)

We have not chosen isolated incidences where the Gospel writers fail to tell the awful significance of the stupendous event they are covering; this characteristic is common throughout. It is for this reason that we, along with Bernard, feel the "Gospel" cannot be restricted to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. To do so means to miss out on the meaning, commentary and application of the events in Jesus' life. As Unger notes:

"The (four) Gospels, strictly speaking, are not an exposition of the gospel... They are an account of the provision of the gospel for needy sinners in the person and work of Christ... For a doctrinal exposition of the gospel we must go to the epistles."19

Here, then, is that strategic relationship between the Gospels and the Epistles which lends tremendous unity to its overall fabric: while the Gospels give us a thorough look at Jesus, the Epistles tell us the cataclysmic significance of His life and work.

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This is the "Gospel"
Another proof that the Gospels are not complete in themselves and that a unity exists between them and the Epistles is found in Jesus' own words. In John 16:12, Jesus tells His sorrow-worn disciples, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." The implication is that much instruction, not little, is yet to be delivered, and that at a later time (i.e., not now).

At this point in the narrative, however, Jesus is already eyeing the road to Golgotha; He will soon die. When, then, is the further instruction to come, and by what means? Verse 13 tells us that the Holy Spirit will descend after Jesus' ascension, and he will give Jesus' words (truth) to the disciples! Bernard, in fact, regards the Epistles as being all that the disciples were not able to bear at this time.

Bernard supports his claim that the Epistles are the continuation of Jesus' teaching by asking the reader to consider Jesus' method of teaching as it is recorded in the Gospel record.
Bernard feels Jesus' method of instruction in the Gospels not only hints at further disclosure of truth, but necessitates it. We need to remember that Jesus taught mostly by example; people did not sit at His feet while He unraveled the mystery of godliness.

Bernard, then, looks at Jesus' method for imparting divine truth and reverentially calls it elementary teaching. Elementary teaching? From the lips of our Lord? Bernard's assessment of Jesus' teaching may sound sacrilegious at first, but if one considers the form, method and substance of Jesus' teaching, the character of that ministry on the whole is truly introductory, simple and rudimentary.

Perhaps everyone knows that our Lord spoke in parables; that was the form most consistently employed in his teaching. What many may have not considered, however, is the fact that the Apostle Paul did not use parables, nor Peter, nor James, nor any of the other New Testament authors. You hear of Pauline theology, for example, but not Pauline parables. Indeed, only Jesus speaks parabolically in the New Testament.

Bernard observes the elementary aspect of parables when he writes:
...this form of teaching belongs to the introduction of knowledge. It seems intended to set the mind working, and to rouse the spirit of inquiry by partial or disguised discoveries of truth." 24

In short, a parable is designed to present one simple truth. It is a seed. We will see later how many of the doctrines in the Epistles are expansions of seed sayings made by Jesus in the Gospels! Indeed, the reason the New Testament writers did not illustrate truth via the use of parables, proverbs or vignettes is simply because systematic truth cannot be put in story form!

METHOD

A second elementary aspect of the Lord's teaching was His method. We have already suggested that Jesus never gave a systematic exposition of doctrine. Rather, He taught on occasion and as various situations demanded a word from Him. Bernard suggests that His teaching was by chance—"carried on by words suited to the moment by separate addresses, or replies to particular persons, and by explanations added to particular acts." 25 You can probably see how such a method would not suffice for intense and more complicated instruction. The Epistles are perfectly adapted in method to do the job Jesus only initiated in the Gospels!
The third elementary aspect of Jesus' teaching, according to Bernard, is the substance of the doctrine itself. Particularly in the Synoptic Gospels, one senses that the great testimonies Jesus gives about Himself go over the heads of the hearers. Says Bernard:

"(Regarding every testimony Jesus makes concerning Himself), we are made to feel that the intimations given are at the time beyond the apprehensions of the hearers, and this not only on account of the dullness of the particular persons, but because the testimonies imply events which have not yet happened, and are fragments of revelation for which the hour is not yet come."26

Indeed, the confused state of Jesus' most loyal followers in the Four Gospels suggests a need for further revelation and clarification of his statements. Consider Martha, who knew there would be a resurrection, yet was totally baffled by Jesus' declaration, "I am the resurrection" (See John 11:25ff). Again, the incomplete nature of Jesus' teaching necessitates the Epistles.

Bernard, by no means, diminishes the importance
of Jesus' teaching by declaring it elementary in form, method and substance. In fact, he finds this elementary character of the teaching to be the very thing that perpetuates further development, elaboration, clarification and fulfillment... in the Epistles!

Seed theology  Great expansions of those seeds

Bernard warns us that although Jesus' teaching is elementary, it nevertheless "includes the substance of all Christian doctrine." Bernard explains this phenomenon thus:

"Every doctrine expanded in the Epistles roots itself in some pregnant saying in the Gospels, and the first intimation of every truth revealed to the holy Apostles by the Spirit came first from the lips of the Son of Man."  

What Bernard is saying is simply this: not all of what Jesus taught is expounded upon in the Epistles, but all doctrine in the Epistles can be traced back to the "pregnant sayings" of the Lord! You can see from the illustrations below how Jesus' particular kind of teaching effects a unity—and a progress—between the Gospels and the Epistles!
"Seed theology" is expanded in the NT epistles

Every doctrine explained in the epistles roots itself in the teachings of Jesus

The above illustrations, of course, show an inter-relatedness between the Gospels and the Epistles that might not be so obvious at first glance. Bernard looks at the entire New Testament as being the expression of the mind of Christ. That is, the mind of Christ has been expressed on all important issues. He further maintains that "The unity of New Testament doctrine lies in this, that it is the teaching of one mind, the mind of Christ." That mind began first to be expressed in the Gospels.

Due to the broad scope of material we have covered in this section, it behooves us to briefly review our major points.
* In looking at the Four Gospels, we saw that the need for further revelation was due to the fact that God, up until the appearance of His Son, had spoken to mankind only in fragments and then only periodically. A complete word was needed, and Jesus revealed all that the Father had to say to mankind.

* We also saw that the content of Jesus' teaching in the Gospels was an exalted view of Law and Grace. The historical content, of course, centered around the introduction of a wonderful Person.

* Progress was seen not only between the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John, but also between the Four Gospels and the Epistles. While the Four Gospels presented a Person, the Epistles offered us an explanation of that Person and His work. Likewise, the elementary teachings in the Gospels served as the seed for the greater body of doctrine found in the Epistles.

* God's supreme method of communicating was found in the Gospels with the introduction of God-in-the-flesh. Jesus became a man to reach man with God's truth. He had disciples who learned from Him by observing His life. He modeled godliness.

And while we did not touch upon the response required in this section, Jesus sums it up in two words:

"FOLLOW ME"

The call to a few men along the shores of Galilee has resounded throughout the world.
FOOTNOTES: THE GOSPELS
(pp. 90-119)


2 ibid., p. 349.


5 Unger, p. 465.

6 ibid.


9 Bernard, p. 32.

10 ibid.

11 Unger, p. 467.

12 ibid.

13 Bernard, pp. 44-49.

14 ibid., p. 44.

15 ibid.

16 Unger, p. 466.

17 ibid.

18 Bernard, p. 34.

19 Unger, pp. 465-466.

20 Bernard, p. 59.

21 ibid., p. 61.

22 ibid.

23 ibid., p. 62.

24 ibid., p. 63.
29 ibid., p. 64.
26 ibid., p. 66
27 ibid., p. 58.
28 ibid., p. 60.
29 ibid.
Before we actually get into the basic message of the New Testament Epistles, we need to consider what prompted the outpouring of such noble writing. As we've stated before, God does not engage in idle talk; He speaks to a need. Every portion of Scripture, then, is adapted to do a certain job; to serve a particular function.

Have you ever wondered what specific job the Epistles were designed to do? G. Coleman Luck asserts that the purpose of the New Testament writings is "to give all needed revelation for God's children...especially as it concerns the Church."¹

Needed revelation? When one looks at the prosperous, Spirit-anointed church founded at Antioch just prior to Paul's missionary journeys, the need for instruction seems practically nil! Antioch, you will recall, was the first purely Gentile Church. It was also here that the disciples of Jesus were first called Christians.²

Seriously, if one visited this early church, we believe that person would be hard-pressed to find a situation demanding a further word from God. Have you ever examined this church closely? According to
Acts 13ff, the Christians at Antioch:

* had heard the Gospel
* were saved
* were Spirit-filled
* were evidencing the fruit of the Spirit
* were exercising spiritual gifts
* were witnessing
* were careful stewards
* sent out the first missionaries

Honestly, now, if you were sent to a church like this one at Antioch, what would you preach? What is their need? Have you ever seen a church like this in your neighborhood?

There are two theological camps today that ignore the Epistles because they see the Antioch believers, and, consequently, themselves, as being thoroughly equipped for ministry. Group A says, "Why, these folks have salvation; they don't need anything else!" Since salvation is the epitome of the Christian experience, this group lives at the Cross and rarely searches the Scriptures beyond the Four Gospels.

The second group, Group B, looks at the Antioch believers, and reasons thus: "They've been saved and filled with the Holy Spirit; they have no further need!"

THERE IS NO NEED
Group B sees the Holy Spirit as the only requirement for living a dynamic, fruitful Christian life.

**THE REAL PROBLEM**

The problem with saying "Salvation is enough" or "The Holy Spirit is enough" is that experience does not bear either claim out. Indeed, 23 books of the Bible—the Epistles, to be specific—were written solely because the believer needed more than salvation and the filling of the Holy Spirit to function the way God intended him to! That's mighty strong evidence that a need did exist for the Antioch believers, and, likewise, for Christians today!

Let's say you know someone who is truly a born-again Christian. For several months after his conversion, this person lived an exemplary life in terms of Bible study, witnessing and giving. One day, seemingly out of the clear blue sky, he confides to you that Scripture seems dry to him, that witnessing is no longer a joy, that he has quit giving to the church altogether. What are you going to tell this man; that he needs to get saved? No, he already knows the Lord! This, dear friend, is one of the crises the Epistles address. This tension within the believer is why the Epistles are so vital!

Many have tried to counsel the above person by saying, "Shame on you! If you knew what Jesus did for you at the Cross, you would be out there winning the world for Him!" Oh, that more of us might remedy this
situation with a word from the Epistles! They were designed to meet just such a need, which, incidently, is common to all believers.

Let's consider another situation. Charles and his wife are newly-weds who have recently received Jesus as their personal Savior. They have prayed together, trusting God for a loan to come through on a new home. They have told all their friends that they really believe God can bring their desire to pass; they have great faith in Him. Several weeks later, they find out that the loan did not go through, and they begin to question their faith. What do they need in this hour? Salvation? The Holy Spirit? No; they need the Epistles!

THE EPISTLES ADDRESS A NEED

It should be remembered that not one of the Epistles is addressed to unbelievers; they are addressed to the saved, to the Spirit-filled. Granted, the church we saw at Antioch might have appeared, at first, to be the ideal church, but we know from Scripture that no church, no individual believer, continues in this world unscathed. Problems, conflicts, tensions arise for all.

Indeed, the person who thinks the Christian life is rosy and trouble-free has not faced life squarely and, yet, the person who thinks God has not responded to this dilemma has not read the Epistles!
Most of us are familiar with the early chapters of the book of Revelation in which Jesus urgently and soberly addresses the Seven Churches. This, however, was not the first time He spoke to His Church in her hour of crisis. As we have noted earlier, no less than 23 letters (the Epistles plus Revelation) were deemed necessary by our Lord to help establish and nurture His Church in this world!

Many of the letters, of course, deal with local problems and issues still confronting the Church today, but two very crucial issues underlie every one of the New Testament writings, and we should like to look at them now.

These are not minor issues. Unresolved, they have the potential of paralyzing the believer, the Church and the very work of God. It is no wonder God addressed 23 books to these two needs!

It doesn't take one very long to discover that one of the biggest problems among Christians today is their lack of understanding their own salvation experience and their inability to live successful Christian lives. That is, they have a new salvation, but they do not understand its essential nature, nor do they know how to work out that new salvation in life and service!

Remember our illustration about the man who suddenly found Bible reading a boring endeavor and who lost his fervor for telling others about the Lord? He was ready to up and quit the Christian life, remember? What would happen to God's program if all believers responded that way? There was nothing inadequate about
this man's salvation, nor was the Holy Spirit dormant in his life. He may have thought so, and others might have offered such heresy, but, in reality, his tensions arose out of a misunderstanding or improper interpretation of what being saved and Spirit-filled actually meant. Experience has shown that, left to himself, every believer will come to the wrong conclusions about his salvation and how to work it out practically. That's why the Epistles are indispensable to the Church.

YOU CANNOT ABANDON A NEW CONVERT TO HIS OWN INTERPRETATION OF WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM WHEN HE GOT SAVED; ONLY GOD CAN GIVE AN ACCURATE INTERPRETATION OF WHAT HAS TAKEN PLACE!

According to Bernard, the function of the Epistles is to "certify to those within the Church the true interpretations and applications of the principles of thought and life which as believers in Jesus they have received."

Salvation is such a marvelous gift. It is our belief that no Christian will ever guess all that he has in Christ—regardless of how spirit-filled he is—unless he looks to the Epistles. Who, for example, would ever guess that he has a seat in heavenly places if God had not revealed it in the Epistles? Likewise, who could convince us that our labor is not in vain in the Lord if it were not for the revealing of that precious fact in the Epistles? Who would intuitively
know that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all unrighteousness if the Epistles had not recorded it? Who would instinctively realize that the Holy Spirit has given him a gift for the upbuilding of the Church had the Epistles remained silent regarding this? Oh, friend, all that we know about our salvation is through revelation, through the word of the Epistles. This, then, is the job of the Epistles:

* THE EPISTLES GIVE GOD'S INTERPRETATION OF YOUR SALVATION

* THE EPISTLES GIVE GOD'S INTERPRETATION OF HOW YOU SHOULD NOW LIVE YOUR LIFE

In essence, the need that the Epistles meet is the need for discipleship: to thoroughly instruct the believer in all aspects of the Christian life. Before we get into the content of the Epistles, we would like to marvel with Bernard at how the Epistles are beautifully adapted to do the job of training disciples. You see, the Epistles contain teaching material. You don't preach to someone who is already saved; you teach or instruct him.

We have a lot of books on discipleship today, but none compare to the discipleship manual we have in the Epistles! In essence, the Epistles are a discipleship course on paper! They serve to follow-up and disciple the new convert and growing Christian in all the ways of Christ. That's the job the Epistles do!
Ah, we come now to the glorious content of the Epistles. This is the section of Scripture which is far above what we could ever ask or think— the riches in glory in Christ Jesus!

It is here that we learn of our acceptance in the Beloved, the forgiveness of our sins, the incredible fact that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing, and made us joint-heirs with the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, the only wise God!

What is all this anyway? grace upon grace, lavish attention from God? The Apostle Paul gives this breathtaking summary:

"THIS IS THE WILL OF GOD, EVEN YOUR SANCTIFICATION."

--1 Thes. 4:3

And this is the primary doctrine of the New Testament Epistles, even your sanctification! God is concerned that every child of His grow in "the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

(Ephesians 4:13)
Merrill C. Tenney defines sanctification as "perfection in holiness" or "to be made holy by being set apart for a special purpose." Unger declares it to be "a setting apart for God's worship and service." These definitions are but partial; we must go to the Epistles for a fuller understanding of what it means to be sanctified.

THREE VIEWS ON SANCTIFICATION

The real issue or question behind sanctification is, "How can a man be holy?" We know this question has ancient origins by Job's perplexing cry, "How can a man be just with God?" (Job 9:1)

Indeed, the Pharisees in Jesus' day erred in thinking that righteousness came by the law (Romans 9:31-32), and sanctification, even today, seems an abused and misunderstood subject.

There are, of course, different theological positions regarding sanctification and the probing question, "How can a man be holy?" We have already alluded to two camps which hold that the Epistles are not a necessary instrument in the sanctification process. We would like to reiterate their views at this time.

ALL WAS ACCOMPLISHED IN THE CROSS

Group A's position on sanctification is that
the Cross accomplished all, and nothing else is needed in order for the believer to walk worthily of his calling. This position holds that salvation is finished thanks to the all-encompassing work at Calvary. God, after all, doesn't leave things half-way done. Therefore, if a person is faltering or barren in their Christian walk, it might be because they were never really saved in the first place! The faltering Christian is told to look again at Calvary, to see afresh what God did in his behalf, and then to go out and do something for God.

**Group A:**

**YOU ONLY NEED THE CROSS**

We noted in our study on the Gospels the fact that, apart from the Epistles, we have little, if any, insight into the awful significance of the Cross. It is not healthy nor wise for a new Christian to limit himself only to the Four Gospels, for these merely present the person and work of Christ historically. It is the Pauline Epistles in which the doctrinal revelation and theological significance of all these events are expounded.

**ANOTHER WORK**

Group B takes the position that another work beyond the Cross is necessary for a Christian to live victoriously. If a Christian—already saved—lacks
power in his life, he needs the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Group B:
YOU NEED A SECOND WORK

Indeed, the Book of Acts is dynamic and exciting, but a Christian cannot confine himself to this historical record of the Spirit's movement; it is the Epistles which will teach him the secret behind a victorious lifestyle!

THE BIBLICAL VIEW

How does God answer the ancient concern of how a man can be righteous before Him? That is, what is God's view on sanctification? We stand with Bernard in asserting that God has expressly designed the Epistles to lead a Christian into the fulness of life. Yes, a person needs Calvary, and, yes, he needs the Holy Spirit, but what can Group A and Group B offer to the believer who is saved and filled with the Spirit, yet meets overwhelming failure in the Christian walk?

Bernard feels the struggling Christian does not need to get saved again, nor does he need yet another work of God beyond the Holy Spirit. What he needs,
says Bernard, is another word from God; he needs the doctrinal teaching of the Epistles.\textsuperscript{9}

Bernard is thankful that the Word of God does not lead us to the entrance of the Christian life, only to leave us at the threshold. He eloquently explains what that great body of noble doctrine—the Epistles—does in the heart of the believer:

"It (the epistolary teaching) recognizes fully, it warmly enters into, all those anxious questions which arise in our hearts as to the real nature of the work of Christ in which you are taught to trust, of that salvation which you desire to receive, of that life which you are called to lead, of those relations to God in which you are placed, of those great prospects which lie before you. And shall negligence or distrust deprive you of the assistance thus prepared, and leave you to encounter the thoughts which crowd upon the awakened soul as if you had to deal with them only by means of your own resources? You are not so left. For those within the Church, those who have received Christ Jesus the Lord, those who own the holy calling, all this teaching is made ready. To them it is expressly addressed, and for their various necessities it is adapted."\textsuperscript{10}

Whew! Do you see why Bernard esteems the Epistles so highly, and finds them a necessary aid to sanctification? We believe Bernard's position
on sanctification is Biblically sound and should be more widely-embraced in theological circles.

Bernard's View:
YOU NEED CALVARY,
THE HOLY SPIRIT
AND THE EPISTLES

We need to discuss yet another aspect of sanctification with our readers, for while it is true that the Epistles tell us the many facets of our sanctification, they are not the source of our sanctification. The truth we are about to share undergirds all the Epistles; one dare not teach anything from the Epistles without first laying this vital foundation.

THE SOURCE OF SANCTIFICATION

Along with outright error, ignorance has probably been the most hindering element in terms of a Christian fully understanding sanctification. This is especially true in regards to the source of sanctification. Many an individual has been saved and falsely sensed a new power within themselves to go out and change the world. Granted, a new convert may exhibit new zeal, new power, new desire to live the Christian life, but he cannot continually feed these new drives out of his own resources, even though he feels as if he can.
Indeed, many have succumbed to defeat and spiritual exhaustion because they cannot muster that inward strength to continue living a "victorious" life for God. In reality, the problem is not in them, mainly because the power is really not in them!

According to the Scriptures, salvation is anchored in a new relationship with a risen Savior. The source of this new life is not in the believer, as he would normally think, but is in Jesus Christ. Unger states this principle beautifully when he says, "(It is) Not what I am in myself, but what I am in Him."  

It is a false view of sanctification which suggests there is something inside the believer that will allow him to accomplish holy works! Let us give you a sampling of the false doctrine that often accompanies a false view of sanctification. Consider these doctrines carefully, for it could be that you hold many of them yourself!

FALSE TEACHING ON SANCTIFICATION:

* you are seated in heavenly places (Ephe. 2:6)
* you are a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17)
* you have access by one Spirit unto the Father (Ephes. 2:18)
* you are filled with the fruits of righteousness (Philippians 1:11)
* God always causes us to triumph (2 Cor. 2:14)
Maybe you are troubled by the fact that we have labelled the above references "false doctrine", particularly since they are found in Scripture. What, you might ask, is false about these verses? Well, you will see what is wrong about them when you compare them with the correct view of sanctification as it is set forth in the Epistles. Hopefully, you will see a very major difference!

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF SANCTIFICATION:

* you are seated in heavenly places IN CHRIST (Ephe. 2:6)
* if any man be IN CHRIST, he is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17)
* For THROUGH HIM (= through Christ) we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father (Ephe. 2:18)
* Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are BY JESUS CHRIST (Philip. 1:11)
* Now thanks be unto God, which always causes us to triumph IN CHRIST (2 Cor. 2:14)

Do you see now the Source of your sanctification? It is "In Christ". This truth undergirds all the doctrine of the Epistles. Yes, the source of everything—justification, regeneration, sanctification—is IN HIM; IN CHRIST JESUS! Your consciousness won't tell you that; you will erroneously think it is in you. That is
why so many Christians are discouraged in their new way of life; they think some kind of energy pack has been planted in them at their salvation. In reality, they have nothing more in them after their conversion than before their conversion! The "power" they need is available only positionally. The Epistles make it very clear that the life, the power, the zeal, the desire are all "In Christ". The believer taps into that dynamic source only because God places him in Christ at his conversion!

The first thing God did when you got saved was to put you in Christ; this is the foundation of every believer's sanctification.

Now that we understand the phrase "In Christ" a little better, we can more fully appreciate Unger's explanation on how a false view of sanctification can be replaced by the true view of sanctification:

"Defeat is due to failure to realize and act upon our gracious position in Christ, converting it by faith into experiential reality. The victory is by knowing and acting on our position of grace in Christ and thus experiencing its power." 

We cannot, of course, exhaust the subject of
sanctification in these few pages; it took God 23 volumes to draw its complete effect. Bernard, however, captures the magnitude of glory which God in Christ has lavished upon the believer with so great a sanctification, and we should like to echo his praises:

"In Christ Jesus!...How does the vivid consciousness of this reality glow in the pages which are before us now? Christ has been manifested, preached, received; and what is the state which has ensued, as exhibited in the consciousness of those who have received them? They are not merely professors of His Name, learners of His doctrine, followers in His example, sharers in His gifts. I may go further. They are not merely men ransomed by His death, or destined for His glory. These are all external kinds of connection in which our separate life may be related to another's by the effect of what he teaches, of what he gives, and of what he does. But it is assumed in the epistles that believers in Jesus are no longer living a life that is only external, and, as it were, parallel to His life. They are in Christ Jesus, and He is also in them."

Ah, did you catch Bernard's last statement? He said, as does Scripture, that Christ is in the believer. We said, however, that the source of sanctification was not in the believer, and we still stand by that. So, then, what is meant by "Christ in you"? We believe this phrase speaks of a relationship; the most intimate relationship possible between two people. Through this relationship, the believer and Christ become one!
A TWO-FOLD ASPECT OF SANCTIFICATION:

You in Christ (RESOURCE)  

Christ in you (RELATIONSHIP)

Let us remind the reader that this relationship between Christ and the believer is of such unfathomable intimacy that the senses cannot certify it. That is, a Christian may never "feel" this oneness; it must be certified by revelation. The Epistles not only assure us of the reality of this bond, they also instruct us to maintain the relationship by abiding in Christ!

DEALING WITH PROBLEMS

Sanctification is truly a heavenly subject, but the Epistles also address the earth-bound existence of the believer. Specifically, the Epistles deal with every problem that believers will face as they carry out the task of proclamation assigned to the Church. Bernard suggests a "curriculum" is readily apparent in the order of the Epistles. Basic issues are covered first, particularly in Romans and Corinthians. The instruction then moves into the areas of pastoral problems and life issues (General
Epistles), and, finally, concludes with a prophetic picture of the last scene in God's redemptive operation (Revelation).14

METHOD

Throughout this study, we have held to the premise that God always employs a method highly suitable to the need He is addressing. We see again in the Epistles how beautifully God's chosen method satisfies the crisis to which it speaks.

The job of the Epistles, you will recall, is to help the saved person understand the full ramifications of his salvation and to work out that salvation in daily life. In effect, the new believer must be discipled or taught to apply the life of God in his everyday experiences.

If you were held responsible for this task—for discipling the child of God—what method would you invent for the occasion? Jesus chose the Epistles for this job, and it is our privilege now to consider just how the Epistles are adapted to "make disciples".

THEY TRAIN THE BELIEVER TO REASON

One of the remarkable aspects of the Epistles is their ability "to teach others also" about the mystery of godliness. Although the Epistles are
designed to train a person in Christ-like living, the writers nowhere say, "Here are 20 principles for holy living" or "Here are the 10 basic steps to sanctification"? Why not? The real crux of teaching—the measure of its success—is not in the amount of truth it imparts, but in the assimilation of that truth by the learner! It is not true teaching where there is no true learning.

Jesus said, "Make learners!" (Matthew 28:19,20). He was not interested in stenographers or secretaries or data operators. He wanted people who would manifest the truths of God as they worked themselves out in personal experience. In this respect, the method employed in the Epistles exacts that method we found in the Poetic Books. That is, God wants His truths, not graven upon stone tablets, nor framed like legal documents, nor even enshrined in Holy Writ—but, rather, He longs for each of us to realize for ourselves "how great is the hope to which he is calling us—the magnificence and splendor of the inheritance promised to Christians—and how tremendous is the power available to us who believe in God" (Ephesians 1:18,19 from the Phillips translation).

Bernard says the Epistles are adapted to teach because they lead a person to think and reason out the truths presented. For example, when the Apostle Paul teaches on the resurrection body (1 Cor. 15:35-58), he doesn't merely assert, "God has told me there will be a resurrection body and that settles it for me!" No—there would be no teaching if Paul laid out this enigmatic doctrine with such abrupt
So how does Paul teach about the resurrection body? He reasons with the addressee, and engages the mind of the hearer in logical thought processes. "Look at nature," Paul says. "The seed that is planted into the ground and dies bears unbelievably different characteristics when it sprouts up again. I think we can learn something about the mystery of the resurrection body from this, don't you?" And so he opens the mind to great Biblical truths.

*BE IMITATORS OF ME!*  

The reason the Psalms have such a hold on so many Christians is the fact that they are able to identify with David's varied experiences. You will remember that God's approach in the Poetic Books was to find Himself a man who was experiencing His truths in daily life. This "personalizing" of doctrine ("The Lord is my Shepherd") is a most effective means for assimilating God's truths into one's innermost being.

Paul often lists his personal experiences to show other believers how they, too, ought to live. It is one thing to preach that God will meet you in all your circumstances, and quite another to say, "I know (i.e. have learned) both how to be abased, and I know how to abound" (Philip. 4:12) The Christian reads Paul's testimony and says, "I
am encouraged! Paul did it, through Christ; I, too, can do it, through Christ." This is teaching at its best, when the truths of God are so real in a person's life, he can say to others, "Validate in your experience what I have found true in mine; be imitators of me!"

**PROGRESS WITHIN THE EPISTLES**

In our section on the Four Gospels, we noted progress between the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) and John's record "which so signally emphasizes the absolute deity of Christ."!

Jesus as man

Jesus as God!

We also suggested that a significant measure of progress could be found between the Four Gospels and the great body of the Epistles, in that the Gospels presented elementary concepts, whereas the latter gave us great theological expansions of fundamental truths. Indeed, Unger makes it clear that there is a very noticeable advance as one moves from the Gospels to the Book of Acts and then into the Epistles:
"In the four Gospels the person and work of Christ are presented historically, eventuating in our Lord's death, resurrection and ascension. In the Acts the result of these historical events is traced in the founding and growth of the church. In the Pauline epistles the doctrinal revelation and theological significance of all these events is expounded." 17

When we examine the Epistles alone, however, we are confronted with a very peculiar kind of progress! Bernard explains this peculiarity in the following words:

"...The progress of doctrine in the Epistles is constituted, not in the first place by the communication of new information, but by the recognition of a spiritual state which has been attained, and by the education of the spiritual life pertaining to it." 18

Let us say the above in another way. Since all New Testament doctrine roots itself in the (past/accomplished) work of Christ, it is not actually the impartation of new information, but is, in fact, an explanation/interpretation of all the believer has gained in Christ. Our being children of light, for example, is not separate and in addition to what took place at Calvary. Rather, that transaction, and thousands of others with it, was
an immediate result of Jesus' death on the Cross. We may not have known that aspect of the Cross until later, but it is, nevertheless, a "past-tense" event. The Epistles serve to remind the believer of all that has been secured in his behalf, and challenges him to recall, or bring into remembrance, not new teaching, but that "past-tense truth" which the Holy Spirit imparted to the college of apostles, and now illumines for those who seek to know the truth.

The Apostle Paul, in particular, punctuates his writings with the phrase, "Know ye not...?" (See 1 Cor. 3:16, for example). Paul is really saying, "Surely, you know this, don't you?" Why does he presume their familiarity with certain facts? Did he just instruct them the day before? No, Paul expects his admonition will cause the believer to think back upon "a spiritual state that has been attained". This "bringing-into-remembrance-progress" in the Epistles is aided by the believer's familiarity with Scripture and by the Holy Spirit's guidance into all truth.

**HIGHER ETHICAL TEACHING**

Another element of progress in the Epistles is their higher ethical teaching. The ethics found in the Epistles show a great advance over the Old Testament teachings, and even surpass Jesus' moral instruction in the Gospels!
In our study of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), we noted how Jesus elevated the Old Testament Law with the phrase, "It has been said...but (now) I say." Whereas the Old Testament Law concerned itself primarily with outward actions ("Do not kill"), Jesus indicted the inward attitudes as the root of sin and declared this internal area had to be checked. He went so far as to put such things as anger and murder on the same plane!

"Ye have heard that it was said of them of old times, Thou shalt not kill....But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment...

---Matthew 5:21,22

Would you consider anger as being in the same category as murder? Jesus apparently did! But now look at Paul, or, rather, the advanced ethical teaching of the Epistles! The Old Testament Law says, "Don't kill!"; Jesus says, "Don't get angry because anger is the root of such things as murder"; and Paul takes the ethic even higher when he says, "Don't even give in to that which might cause you to flare up!" (See Ephe. 4:31; Col. 3:8)

Look, too, at the issue of fornication. The Old Testament Law says, "Don't give yourself to a harlot because it is sinful to do so!" Do you know
what the Epistles say about this? "Don't give yourself to a harlot because...you are joined to Christ!" (See 1 Cor. 6:15,16) Ah! Do you see the new motivation behind the Law and commandments? It is the relationship between Christ and the believer. This is the true foundation of all New Testament doctrine, and no one should ever teach from the Epistles without first laying this foundation.

In summary, then, we should like to suggest that the "law" of the Epistles get very close to the essence of God's character.

**TOPIC PROGRESSION**

We have already discussed a third way in which the advance of New Testament doctrine can be marked, and that is in its curriculum-like arrangement. As Bernard observes:

"...we advance from the first momentous question of justification for individual souls through a thousand various exigencies and unfoldings of the life of faith till we reach the outer circle of ministerial provision for the care of the Church and the stewardship of the truth."20

From Romans to Revelation the urgent requirements and pressing needs of the spiritual life "are met at every point and provided for in natural though informal
succession," Bernard concludes.

RESPONSE

What is to be the response to the powerful teaching of the Epistles? The best word, perhaps, is:

ABIDE

Jesus used that word no less than ten times in the Upper Room when He explained the relationship of believers to Himself (John 15:1-10). Merrill C. Tenney offers a most challenging commentary on the significance of this particular word:

"The word 'abide', which occurs ten times in this passage (John 15:1-10), means the maintenance of an unbroken connection rather than repose, and bespeaks the necessity of a constant, active relationship between the believer and his Lord, if the resultant life is to be productive." 22

We've already seen how the "Christ in me/me in Christ" relationship is equivalent to "We are one". The Holy Spirit bears witness with the believer's spirit that he is... saved? No; that he is... a child of God! (Romans 8:16) That is, the Holy Spirit
bears witness to a relationship. It is crucial, however, that this relationship be maintained, and nothing short of total commitment will suffice.

"You must go on growing in me and I will grow in you. For just as the branch cannot bear any fruit unless it shares the life of the vine, so you can produce nothing unless you go on growing in me. I am the vine itself, you are the branches. It is the man who shares my life and whose life I share who proves fruitful. For apart from me you can do nothing at all."

--
Although Revelation is often grouped with the Epistles, we should like to treat it separately on the basis of its two incredible distinctions.

Foremost, we believe Revelation answers a need beyond that addressed by the Epistles with such creative unction on God's part, it deserves our separate exultation.

Secondly, the soul-thrilling climax found in this apocalyptic literature demands an audience not fixed on earth-bound exigencies, but one devoted to the triumph of God's honor and the establishment of His eternal Kingdom.

Before we gaze with transfixed wonder at what Unger calls "the great unveiling par excellence of the future", a definition of apocalyptic literature is in order. It is in order because "the doctrine of last things" found in John's Apocalypse (i.e., the book of Revelation) differs significantly from the kind of writing—and doctrine—we just viewed in the Epistles.
"Apocalypse" is a Greek term meaning revelation or unveiling. It is a style of writing that falls into the category of prophecy, particularly prophecy in its predictive aspect. We know from our study of the prophets that Biblical prophecy, whether declarative ("Thus saith the Lord") or futuristic (showing things yet to come), is, above all, divine revelation. That is, it is direct communication from God.

Bernard's definition for doctrine, you will recall, was "truth as communicated by God". If you read the opening words of the Apocalypse, you will discover it is Jesus, not John, who tells "the things which must shortly come to pass". (Rev. 1:1)

Since it is Jesus who is teaching about future things, we find ourselves embracing a book of doctrine. Or might it be better said that we embrace the continuation of a doctrine begun in the Gospels? Jesus, we know, told His disciples in John 16:13 that the Holy Spirit would "show them things to come", and He began a discourse on "last things" Himself in Matthew 24. We believe that Revelation is but a continuation of that seed.

The doctrine in Revelation, of course, is peculiar from that which we find in the Epistles, but it need not pose any difficulties here. Just

* Bernard treats the prophecy in Revelation as predicted fact or external events which "grow into a scheme of doctrine" only as they enter our whole system of thought and feelings and are taught as such. Thus, while he calls Revelation "the last teaching of Scripture", he views the book as predicted history.
remember that the teaching in the epistles is explanatory, whereas the teaching in Revelation is predictive or future. Things which have not yet happened cannot be explained in their full theological significance.

**IS THERE ANOTHER NEED?**

In his closing comments on the Epistles, Bernard summons us to "observe with admiration the singular fitness of the few words of St. Jude to close the series of writings through which the faith has been wrought out and consigned to the Church for ever". He further observes:

"It only remains for our last instructor to exhort us 'earnestly to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints'; to warn us of the dangers of relapse; to entreat us 'to build ourselves up on our holy faith, and praying in the Holy Ghost to keep ourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life'; and, finally, to commend us 'to Him who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy'."6

Whew! what further word from God could the faithful require on the heels of such splendid
oratory? Indeed, is it even needful to turn our eyes with wanting gaze upon our sufficient Provider and say, "Tell me more!" after reading the consolation Jude offers to true believers?

Some would answer "Nay!" too quickly, forgetting the times when God didn't seem in control of things after all, when the physical body tired before the spiritual task was done, when the tumult of inward conflict could not be quelled by Scripture readings, when senseless deaths and needless setbacks in the Kingdom of God made Christianity a very perplexing business.

"What Christian has ever felt that way?" some might cry, and we dare to respond, "Paul did!" The Apostle Paul. The Paul who gave us most of the New Testament letters.

Yes, Paul had a mind to do God's will, but have you ever read how his flesh was constantly warring with his spirit? (Romans 7:14-25) Yes, he was a human dynamo when it came to establishing churches across the land, but his "farewell address" in 2 Timothy 4 betrays the petered energies, the body too spent to recover lost ground. Do these seem a suitable climax to God's divine preparations?

What about your own experience? Have you ever cried out, "I feel sure a day is coming when I'll no longer be tempted, when this body will no longer fail me, when the last enemy (death) will finally be overcome, but, oh, to see it!"? You've read in the Epistles of eternal life, of being joint-heirs with Christ, of the utter destruction
of Satan, and yet there is a void, a sense that not all has been fulfilled yet. Indeed, the Epistles create a longing, a need for more to come if God's redemptive plan is to be fulfilled, but Revelation, oh, Revelation settles every unfinished work of grace! All the divine preparations throughout the ages will not have a logical result if you omit the book of Revelation.

!!! REVELATION DECLARES GOD'S SUCCESS!

It is here that we find Christ universally exalted, God's wrath poured out upon the ungodly, the kingdoms of earth made subject to our King, the drying of all tears, the repair of the physical body, the life everlasting, the destruction of Satan, the end of sin's reign, the brilliant glory of God's presence among His people, the restoration of relationships between God and man, and a humanity distinguished by the purity and holiness of Almighty God! Let us say it again:

GOD'S VICTORY
Although the Epistles contain everything needed for growing a person up in Christ, they still lack a conclusion to all of God's divine work! This is the need Revelation meets so well; it tells the steadfast Christian of a salvation complete and perfect in its glory.

Ah, what a splendid panorama now unfolds before us! Revelation is the one book where we can almost hear the believer's last sigh in terms of this present world, and his first truly jubilant song in terms of the next. This is where we find the doctrine of consummation in all its wonderful facets, the perfect, absolute, ideal salvation.

Here, too, we witness "the triumph of Christ and the ultimate triumph of His own". This is also where we find "the central terminal where all the great trunk lines of the prophetic Word converge, and is thus the consummation of all revealed truth".

We dare not call this a mere concluding part to God's redemptive drama. It is Christ Himself, the Alpha and Omega, the first and only hope of Man's immortality and access to God, displayed in all His terrible majesty. Christ is the consummation of all that was ever in the heart of God.
It is not our purpose here to study the mysterious language and symbols of this great apocalyptic work, or to insist on a dogmatic chronology of its stupendous events. The introduction promises great joy at the hearing of its basic message, and that shall be our focal point. Too often, the reader gets caught up in the book's fantastic interpretations and weird imagery and thereby does not hear the shouts of victory that ring throughout its pages.

Wherein is the victory, and what scenes will make the heart of man glad? Bernard selects the gems of consummation (it has many facets, remember) from amid the dust and riot, and simply says, "Behold!" His discoveries, we believe, clarify and accentuate the blessing to be received, and we look to them now in absolute wonder. These, then, are the aspects of the great consummation that God does not want us to miss.

THE GROUNDS OF CONSUMMATION

Oh, what a blessing comes when one discovers
the grounds for the climatic finish of our salvation!
Do you know who or what so faithfully perfected the
purposes of God? Revelation does not hide this aspect
from us. What did the Apostle John see when he fixed
his eyes on Mt. Zion immediately preceding the fall
of Satan and all evil powers? Do you remember? Re-
velation 14:1 says, "And I looked, and, lo, the King
of Kings stood on mount Sion." No, it says, "And I
looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion":

The grounds for the consummation is the Lamb
that was slain, the glorious Cross of Jesus Christ!
He was slain before the foundation of the world
(Rev. 13:8) that His blood might sprinkle many na-
tions (Isa. 52:15), and through its sheltering, at-
toning, liberating, pardoning, cleansing aspect bring the many to God. Oh, friend, does that not
make you glad?! We turn now to another aspect of
the consummation that will bless you.

THE HISTORY OF CONSUMMATION

Do you know the real history behind God's
sublime salvation? Have you ever wondered what is really going on in this old world? Revelation makes the history of the consummation evident by taking the reader behind the scenes--where he has never been before--to see the reality of spiritual and satanic conflict that has waged the long ages of God's redemptive efforts.

It is here that the reader catches the first glimpses of that fierce and awful conflict between God and Satan which heretofore had been mercifully veiled. Genesis 3:15 hinted at such a conflict, but the child of God has rarely known or experienced the treacherous clash of that fearsome engagement. It were enough that the Christian should preoccupy himself with his own skirmishes between the flesh and the spirit!

We have not felt the heat of that invisible warfare lest we would have fainted. The book of Daniel provides rare—if not singular—commentary on the intensity of this unseen battle. Who has not staggered at the thought that even a messenger of God was hindered three solid weeks in responding to Daniel's prayer for insight because satanic forces hindered him?! (Daniel 10:13)

Revelation is the first book that pictures the manger scene from God's perspective, and lets us know that in the midst of angelic song and quiet awe, an enraged dragon waited to devour the Christ-child! (Rev. 12:4) When have you ever seen a nativity display picturing such horror?
Is it really a blessing to find out that such demonic assault has prevailed in the hidden atmosphere of this very world all these long ages? We surely think so. For one, the fiery trials encountered by the Christian begin to make a little more sense when he realizes he has been engaged in no insignificant combat. Indeed, the struggles he has endured have not been some silly game devised by God to prove his character; they are serious assaults from the Enemy. But, oh, there is relief from the press of battle, and healing for our wounds, thanks to the blood of Christ!

Moreover, it is our Captain who has been at the front lines—amidst the heaviest fighting—thwarting the foe and checking his advances, thereby giving us strength to stand our ground in the lesser and more local skirmishes.

**THE HEART OF THE CONSUMMATION**

Oh, friend, look up, for your redemption draweth nigh! The heart of the consummation is the glorious appearing of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!
What a moment in history! It's not just that every eye shall see Him, but that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father! And, oh, at His coming, the struggle with sin will be over, the righteous shall rule, the creation will be fashioned anew, the pure impress of God's character will be seen in His people, and Peace will stretch her arms of comfort all the way around the world!

This, too, is the blessed hope of the Church, the reward of steadfast faith, that the Bride and Bridegroom should finally be joined and spend their honeymoon in eternity!

VICTORY IS AT HIS COMING

How oft have we stood at a graveside and watched a loved one being lowered into the damp, cold earth? It is a sad, unpleasant scene, even for the Christians who might be present, because one can sense that Satan loves attending funerals for the thrill of making his heinous boast, "I still have power!" But, oh, that flaunted arrogance will be crushed forever at the consummation of this age! Friend, there will be victory at Jesus' coming!

We will someday stand at the edge of a bottomless pit reserved for Satan and his angels, and this time we will have the upper hand. As the demon forces plunge the unmeasured depths of darkness, and Satan's
boast becomes an insignificant whimper, we shall be able to say of that repulsive foe, "He has no power!" This, truly, is a cause for mirth.

And what a blessing that Revelation has shown us this victory. God did not have to spell out for us how the agents of darkness will be sealed in the bottomless pit. He didn't have to share with us the exact details of Satan's demise. But He did. The only reason we know the sure outcome of this prolonged conflict is because God chose to reveal it to us! Aren't you glad you know for certain that Satan will get his due, and that victory is promised for those who stand with Jesus? If we could grasp the depth of even one blessing that flows out of the consummation, what a happy people we would be!

**THE CONSUMMATION INVOLVES JUDGMENT**

Truly, if there is an enemy, there must also be a judgment, and the book of Revelation declares that the wrath of God will be unleashed at the Lord's coming. Frightful pictures of this outpouring are found in Revelation 15 and 16. For the Christian, however, it is a happy thought to know that "the prince of this world is judged" (John 16:11) so conclusively.

Yes, the Christian can rejoice in this stormy hour, but, oh, that unrepentant man would pay heed to this warning of future judgment. As Bernard explains:
"Things do not melt quietly into the peace of the kingdom of God. There is a crash of ruin, and a winepress of wrath of Almighty God, and a lake that burns with fire and brimstone. And this judgment falls not only on principles and powers of evil, but on nations of men; and not only nations, but on separate persons, even on 'every one who is not found written in the Book of Life'."

Perhaps the "blessing" of knowing this doctrine of judgment is knowing that God, in patient mercy, has forewarned all mankind of this terrible day. God has never remained silent in terms of man's need; He does not delight in allowing men to ignorantly indulge in folly so He can squash them at an unsuspected moment. Those who perish in this tumult will do so out of disregard for God's fair warning.

There is another blessing in knowing the consequences of God's wrath ahead of time, especially for the Christian. Such knowledge can facilitate an eager address to his companions and acquaintances who genuinely don't realize the consequences—or way of escape—of this dread day. Paul put it this way: "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11).

**THE CONSUMMATION BRINGS RESTORATION**

Whew! Were it not enough that our Lord should come in glory, that the mouths of blasphemers... should
be silenced, that the redeemed should realize their inheritance in Christ? Who would fathom there should be even more blessings but those whose God exercises perfection in the satisfaction of all His holy desire?

The late Watchman Nee may not have gained a significant audience when he pointed to creation as God's greatest initiative; the Church, naturally, has always focused on redemption. We believe, however, that Nee's basic premise is substantiated by what unfolds in Revelation. He argued that "The place of redemption cannot be higher than that of creation."12

According to Nee, "Redemption does not bring anything new to us; it only restores to us what is already ours. God through redemption achieves His purpose in creation. To redeem means to restore and recover; to create means to determine and initiate. Redemption is something afterward, so that God's purposes in creation may be fulfilled."13

Ah, this is the reason there must be something beyond the cataclysmic close of this age: God is not finished yet! The battle hinted at in Genesis 3:15 has been determined, but paradise has not been regained. Bernard observes:

"The coming of the Lord is not the last thing we know (from the prophecy in Revelation). After that event has closed the present age, after the victory has been won, and the judgment has dealt with things that are past, the final results appear, and the true life of man begins."14
Ah, how that phrase, "the true life of man", harks back to Adam and all the hopeful expectations God had had for his race. And despite the fact that the true life of man was never realized through Adam's headship, Jehovah never rescinded that goal, but swore by Himself to bring it to pass. That's what we find in Revelation: the realization of God's desire and the reinstatement of man, through Christ, in God's image. Numbers 14:21 expresses the heart of God's desire through redemption:

God's goal involves earth.

God's goal involves the inhabitants.

God's goal involves a Christ-like people

Is there anything in Revelation that suggests God's purposes will be realized at last? Behold, the commencement address of the New Age:
"I (John) saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away... And I John saw the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

No wonder Bernard sees this text as the culmination point of all Biblical teaching! Here we have all the vital ingredients for the restoration of paradise, and, consequently, God's original purposes! We have a new earth. We have a city, which implies people, society and relationships. But wait! It is not just a city; it's a holy city, a society of people marked by godliness! Surely, you will want to revel with Bernard in the glory of this commencement address:

"Here, at the last step, we have a definite and satisfactory completion of the former doctrine of the future. There is to be a perfect humanity, not only perfect individually, but perfect in society."

The idea of a city, of a corporate society, Bernard says, more fully satisfies God's purposes than does our emphasis today on individual salvation. He challenged the individualism of his day—and ours
also--with this reminder:

"The former Scriptures have revealed the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior, not only of individual souls, but also of 'the body, the Church'. The final result of his appearing is shown not only in the peace, the holiness, the participation, and inherence in Him of each separate person, but in the formation of a corporate existence, a society in which man is perfected, a kingdom in which God is glorified."17

Bernard believes the Epistles speak of a corporate personality in regards to the Church, but it is diminished by our focus on individual salvation. As far as Bernard is concerned, however, the Church is not so much for the sake of the individual as the individual for the sake of the Church.18

Our solo attempts to live godly lives results in a frustration, says Bernard, that demands some outside support. He believes, in fact, that man has a strong need to share in a corporate existence, and sees the city concept in Revelation as the remedy to that need. Although the idea of 'body life' springs from the Epistles, Bernard feels there is a need for continuance and a more successful close to the story of unity 19:
"The sense of sharing in a corporate existence, and in a history and destinies larger than those which belong to us as individuals, tends to throw the mind forward upon a course of things to come, through which this various history is to run, and these glorious destinies are to be reached. More especially is this the case where there is a strong contrast between the ideal expectations which we have formed and the actual realization which at any particular time we behold.

When present things in measure disappoint us, we turn more eagerly to the brighter future, and look beyond the darkened foreground to the light which glows on the horizon. Who does not feel, in reading the Epistles, that some such sense of present disappointment grows upon him, and that such dark shadows are gathering on the scene?"20

According to Bernard, the concept of a city as presented in Revelation is "the most perfect realization, and the most convenient representation of society in its maturity."21 That is, "the various relations of men are so combined as to promote the welfare of the several members, and secure the unity of a common life to the whole."22 Indeed, wouldn't you like to reside in such a place? Truly, such an environment is the only one in which the conditions of God's pleasure shall be met!
THE CITY OF GOD WILL BE A SOCIETY CHARACTERIZED BY:

- LOVE FOR EACH OTHER
- LOVE FOR GOD

These, then, are the consummate blessings which magnify themselves without tedious study of this glorious revelation. Oh, that more people would lay aside, even for a moment, the complicated imagery, the diverse and fantastic interpretations, the formulas and the still-veiled secrets of this final communication from our Lord, and would see what is most needful to the eye and heart: that these pages tell the complete success of all that matters to the heart of God!

THE METHOD

Since we know that God's method of communicating His truth is always appropriate to the need it addresses, we will see that Revelation is no exception. Although this stupendous book is prophetic in nature,
it is unlike the prophecy that was delivered by them of old time.

You will recall that the prophets raised up by God prior to the split and demise of the Davidic Kingdom were qualified to speak to their equals because the word of the Lord had come to them, and God had put His words in their mouth. What they heard, then, they gave also unto the people, declaring emphatically, "Thus saith the Lord!"

There is a unique aspect in John's prophecy, however. He, our brother and companion in tribulation—reports primarily what he has seen. God is doing something unique in method!

G. Coleman Luck notes that the phrase "I saw" (or its equivalent) occurs no less than 49 times in this apocalyptic record. There is a reason for our stressing the sight aspect of this revelation.

In Revelation 1:9, the exiled apostle calls himself "a companion in tribulation" and "a companion in patience of Jesus Christ." This description is vital to understanding God's mercy in showing John things to come versus telling him future things. You see, the aged disciple was banished to the Isle of Patmos because he preached the Word of God and testified of Jesus (verse 9). The very fact that he was exiled by a pagan emperor, plus his association with the saints in tribulation, indicates to us that things were not very rosey for the First Century Church!
Take note that, at this particular stage in his life, John was probably very conscious of the fact that he alone was left of Jesus' early and intimate circle of disciples. Most of the others by this time had faced martyrdom. The songs, the sharing and the thanksgiving of the early Church diminished as new onslaughts of persecution broke out and as men looked with wanting gaze for that same Jesus which was taken up into heaven and was to return.

What would you say to a disciple who has been patient in faith, and has not yet received the promise? What would you say to a persevering Church that slowly begins to realize the expected deliverance may not come until lions have had their fill and the body has been destroyed? Would you merely talk to such as these?

In our spiritual arrogance, we Christians often scoff at the maxim, "Seeing is believing", especially in the realm of faith. In reality, though, we all long with the hymnwriter for the day in which faith shall be sight. Jesus knew it wasn't enough to tell John, 'Hey! Everything is going to work out!' No, Jesus called John close, and let him see for himself that all things work together for good to them that love God and are the called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28)

It is human nature to validate promises by sight. For example, if a husband says he will fix a broken faucet, the typical response of the wife is, "Yeah, we'll see."
Imagine what the Church would have said to John if his only comfort to them in this hour--this hour when assurance was so crucially needed--had been, "I'm here to tell you..."! But, oh, the grace of God has ever considered the frame of man! Scripture says that eye hath not seen...the things which God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Cor. 2:9), so just imagine the impact that would be made by one whose eyes have seen! What revival comes, even to the most wearied faith, when John declares, "I'm telling you what I saw with my own eyes!"

And yet, have you ever wondered how one man's testimony of what he saw could sustain generations of believers? Ah, friend, the sustaining power of the book of Revelation is not exclusively John's assertion of what he saw. God anticipated your need to see...and "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass" is His method of enlightening your eyes!

How we ought to praise God for His sensitivity in meeting our inmost needs!

PROGRESS

We need not elaborate here on the idea of progress because consummation implies arrival! Although much of Revelation is still future, we find no need beyond its pages for more revelation. God's "Progress of Redemption" is complete!
What was God's purpose in giving us Revelation? What was to be the result of these glorious visions being impressed upon our hearts and minds? Primarily, our response should be "to hold fast to the faith, to endure to the end" because the fulfillment of these predictions is drawing near.25

The letters to the Seven Churches, of course, also necessitate a response of self-examination and repentance and a fresh determination to get back on course in terms of Christian duty and outreach.

Finally, for those who have been "a companion in patience of Jesus Christ" and who have served Him faithfully and who watch for His glorious appearing, the cry is "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." (Rev. 22:20)
REVELATION
(pp. 148-170)


4Bernard, p. 4.

5Ibid., p. 158.

6Ibid.

7Unger, p. 841.

8Ibid., p. 838.

9Bernard. The different aspects of consummation are on pages 195-210 in Bernard's book but are abbreviated here.


13Ibid.


15Ibid., p. 203.

16Ibid.

17Ibid., p. 189.

18Ibid., p. 190.

19Ibid.

20Ibid.

21Ibid., p. 203.

22Ibid.

23Luck, p. 250.
24 Horatio G. Stafford, "It is Well with My Soul," hymn.

25 Unger, p. 839.