

COUNSEL

Whom God hath raised up,
having loosed the pains of death:
because it was not possible
that he should be holden of it.
(Acts 2:24)

WHY WEEPEST THOU?

HE LEADETH ME

HEZEKIAH (PART 3)

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

CHRISTIAN SINGING

PRETERISM EXAMINED

THE POWER OF THE ASSEMBLY

LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES—PHILADELPHIA

March – April 2007

Why Weepest Thou?

On resurrection morning Mary Magdalene arrived early, “when it was yet dark”, John tells us, at the sepulcher. Her devotion to the Lord is well known and is a lesson for all of us. Would that every believer was devoted to the Lord Jesus as Mary was.

The various events connected with the discovery of the empty tomb by the disciples are full of fascination for us in addition to many practical lessons of faith. We hesitate to be too critical of their lapses of unbelief since such unbelief is painfully familiar to us in our own experience.

Among the many lessons to be learned from the gospel writers’ record of the empty tomb this one is recorded by John. He records a question put to Mary by both the angels and the Lord Himself. It was the same question. It was designed to draw out her faith and come to her relief. It caused her to discover for herself the groundless basis of her sorrow and anxiety. Times of confusion or uncertainty in life are

ideal opportunities for us to cast ourselves on the Lord and seek His counsel above all others. James puts it this way, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (Jas. 1:5).

The question was this: “Woman, why weepest thou?” Mary’s answer was, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.” How little even Mary grasped of her lack of understanding. That the Lord had died was evident. But her sorrow was multiplied in her mind by the absence of His body. She thought she might find at least a little comfort in caring for a suitable burying place. She thought she might find comfort in that. But even if she found a body, what comfort would there have been? It would not change the fact He had died. Her sorrow would remain nonetheless.

How kind and gentle were the Lord’s words. “Woman, why weepest thou?” An exasperated Mary might have responded like this, “Why do you think I am weeping? My hope is gone. The One who pronounced forgiveness of my sin has died. What is to become of a sinner like me without a Saviour? If He does not live, I am lost. Of course I weep.” But the Lord’s question was to cause her to stop and think. The implication of His question was this, “Woman, why weepest thou? Your Saviour is not dead. He is alive. Your faith is resting on a living Saviour. I am He.” As the account unfolds before us we see the enormous relief Mary experiences. Her hopeless sorrow was turned to unbridled joy. Her fears dissipate like the morning

mist in the sunshine. The only tears justified here are tears of joy.

But this question could be put to us too. “Man, woman, why weepest thou?” Do we not sometimes face life as if we had no risen Saviour? Do we not try to solve life’s perplexing problems as if there was no risen Christ with us? And do we not carry needless fear and anxiety sometimes?

The Lord is no less interested in us than He was in Mary. His power remains limitless. His knowledge of our circumstances is perfect. His resources are available. This is confirmed to us by the epistles where the Lord is presented as always near and caring for His people after His ascension. We think for example of the closing chapter of Hebrews where the writer quotes a variety of Old Testament verses and applies them to the believer of this present age with these words, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5). Or words like these to the Philippians from Paul, the apostle: “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7).

There is no doubt that life sometimes causes us to weep. The Lord never minimizes the time of sorrow. He Himself was the Man of Sorrows. But such sorrow is not despair. There is always hope with Him. He is alive! He is interested in you. “Why weepest thou?”

Brian Gunning
St. Catharines, Ontario





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Revelation 3:7-13

“To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

Letters to the Seven Churches — Philadelphia

The city of Philadelphia lay about 28 miles north-east of Sardis and about 75 miles from the Aegean Sea. Because of its proximity to eastern borders and ready access to Mysia, Lydia and Phrygia it was strategically well-placed to exploit the political opportunity to export the Greek language and culture to those places—it was known as “the gateway to the East”. It boasted beautiful architecture and was called “little Athens”. The area was volcanic and that brought with it some good news and some bad. The good news was that the soil was very rich and eminently suitable for the growing of grapes, and the bad news was that due to repeated earthquakes it was actually safer to live outside the city rather than within. The inhabitants constantly fled, and returned. One of the promises given to the overcomers here was that they “should go out no more”, indicating a new spiritual stability and security unknown in their physical lives. Philadelphia had been built originally by king Attalus II whose family name, or nickname, was “Philadelphus”, meaning, of course, “brotherly love”. A modern city now stands on the site and is known by its Turkish name of Alasehir.

In the city were many temples hosting regular religious festivals. The main god was Dionysus, the god of wine, and while he dominated there were also temples to Artemis, Helios, Zeus and Aphrodite. The worship of these 'deities' encouraged sin and moral wickedness in the city because of the licentious practices of their devotees. Economically, in addition to vineyard cultivation the locals also processed licorice which was used as a sweet flavoring to combat the bitter taste of many medicines and make them

One of the promises given to the overcomers here was that they “should go out no more”, indicating a new spiritual stability and security unknown in their physical lives.

more palatable. Destroyed in an earthquake in 17AD the city was rebuilt by Tiberius and for some years was known as “New Caesarea”.

As with Smyrna, there is no note of condemnation in the letter. The church here was thought to have been weak and struggling, yet its people were faithful and lived for the Lord to the best of their ability.

Introduction, v. 7

Unlike all the other letters there seems to be no reference back to chapter 1 in this introduction unless it be “the key” (1:18), but even that, is not the same key as this. There are, however, a number of different statements made about the Lord in this one verse. We are reminded that He is “holy”. Holiness is appropriate in connection with His Person, character and work. He is absolutely separate from evil and detests everything that is associated with it. He has no sin, indeed is quite unable to sin and as such the word suggests the awe that realization brings in the hearts of those who are deeply conscious of their own sin. The Lord is referred to in Acts 3:14 as “the Holy one”. He is “true”; that is to say He is genuine, reliable and consistently trustworthy, unlike the false deities worshipped and served in the city. Further, He has “*the key of David*”. This is likely a reference to Isaiah 22:22-24 where God's servant Eliakim is clothed with the robe of authority, strengthened with the girdle of victory and government is delivered into his hand. The key of the house of David is upon his shoulder and, fastened as a nail in a sure place, he had control over David's house. So the Lord Jesus Christ has the key to unlock all the treasures of God and to fulfil all the

messianic promises of the Old Testament Scriptures. Absolute authority and complete trust and confidence are vested in Him. When He opens none can shut and when He shuts none can open. He is omnipotent and His actions and decisions are irreversible. This is the Lord who watched over His church then and continues to do so now.

Commendations, v. 8

As with other churches in these seven, the Lord fully knows their works and ongoing labour in service for Himself. He appreciates the effort put in by the assembly but is concerned that they should understand that whatever opportunities

within their range and capability to make use of. The idea of an opened door is common in the New Testament and we have an example in 1 Corinthians 16:9, a “*great door and effectual*” and with Paul at Troas “*a door was opened by the Lord*.” We also have mention in Colossians 4:3, “*a door of utterance*” and in Acts 14:27, “*a door of faith to the Gentiles*”. These all appear to refer to gospel opportunities and one may take the same view here. If doors of opportunity are to be opened up we must rely on the Lord to do it and not seek to batter them down in our own strength. When He provides the way forward none can defy Him. This is His divine prerogative.

The Lord Jesus Christ has the key to unlock all the treasures of God and to fulfil all the messianic promises of the Old Testament Scriptures.

come their way and whatever results follow are down to Him, and not to them. They have been presented with an open door. This may mean any number of things. It may have the idea that in coming to faith in Christ they were excommunicated from the synagogue and its door was closed to them but they found in the assembly an open door of refuge, welcome and appreciation. The assembly became to them all that the synagogue had previously meant and more. However, the more likely meaning is that an open door for evangelistic opportunity had been put before them. The thought of “set before” is that He had given them, as a gift, an “opened-up door” into territory hitherto untouched by the gospel. It was “in their face” or

It may seem that the saints of the Philadelphian assembly were not particularly well-equipped to exploit this opportunity in the gospel. They had “*little strength*”, i.e., they were possibly few in number and had little influence in the life of the city. However, they had kept His Word and had not denied His name. This combination of weakness, faithfulness to the Word of God and personal devotion to Christ is exactly what God can, will, and delights to use for His glory. In our day of falling numbers in assembly fellowship in the Western world, which we rightly bemoan, we should remember that the Lord may be allowing numbers to decrease so that when revival comes, as it undoubtedly will, the glory will be very obviously His and not ours.

We have no license to compromise in order to keep numbers up and in so doing we may be hindering the very blessing we seek. We must seriously cultivate personal devotion as well as loyalty to His Word. Robert Murray McCheyne believed that when a

His dealings with some of them we see divine sovereignty: *"I will make them"*. What will He make them do? Firstly, to come, and secondly to worship alongside the believers taking their place with humility in contrast to their earlier arrogance.

other New Testament occurrences, *"out of"] the hour of temptation."* *"The hour"* is not a local phenomenon soon to happen in Philadelphia but a universal occurrence which will come upon all the earth at the same time and in suffering of unparalleled

It is important to live in the light of His coming realizing that it could happen at any time and, when it does, with startling rapidity.

group of believers saw the value of missions and were prepared to go through the open door it was then the Lord began to bless in "their own backyard." The 1839 revival in Dundee started when he was away in Israel! Let us therefore cultivate an interest in missions abroad and perhaps see the Lord's appreciation of our exercise in blessing at home.

Condemnations

As mentioned above, there is no condemnation. That is not to suggest the believers were perfect. Far from it, but the Lord raises none of these matters because their circumstances do not warrant His public disapproval. When saints are weak and struggling the Lord seeks to support rather than to criticize.

Instructions, vv. 9-11

Here we have three promises from Christ to His church. We notice that the people spoken to in these verses once belonged to the Jewish synagogue in Philadelphia, here referred to as *"the synagogue of Satan"* due to it being the source of constant opposition and outright hostility to the saints. The synagogue members were indeed Jews by nature but not so spiritually. Now, in

In other words some of these Jews will be converted and will come to the assembly seeking permission to worship Jesus Christ with the believers. God is able to save the unlikely of sinners and often does so. He undertakes to do so in Philadelphia. The small and struggling company would be encouraged by growth and it is noteworthy that the first desire of these new converts will be to worship the One who saved them. They will regret that formerly they hated the saints and they will now understand firsthand how much God loved these dear ones in the church. The salvation of these from Satan's synagogue was very obviously a work of God alone in which the saints seemed to have no part to play except to welcome them. He is still the same God and does the same things today. Let us welcome the results.

The second promise is given based on the endurance of the believers in waiting for the Lord's return. They, like many others, faced persecution but in spite of the cost they kept His word and His name faithfully. The Lord notes that! In return, He assures them that He will keep them *"from [most usually translated in*

severity. This must be a reference to that period of time described elsewhere as *"the great tribulation"*, see Jeremiah 30 and Daniel 12, and confirmed in the synoptic Gospels. The promise to this local church, and by extension to all local churches, is that they will be kept from having to go through it.



When saints are weak and struggling the Lord seeks to support rather than to criticize.

The third promise is that the Lord will come quickly. That is not to say that He will come soon but that He will come suddenly. His coming, at the rapture and in judgment, will take people by surprise. In view of this the instruction is to *"hold fast"* lest, while waiting carelessly, the crown of reward be lost. It is important to live in the light of His coming realizing that it could happen at any time and, when it does, with startling rapidity.

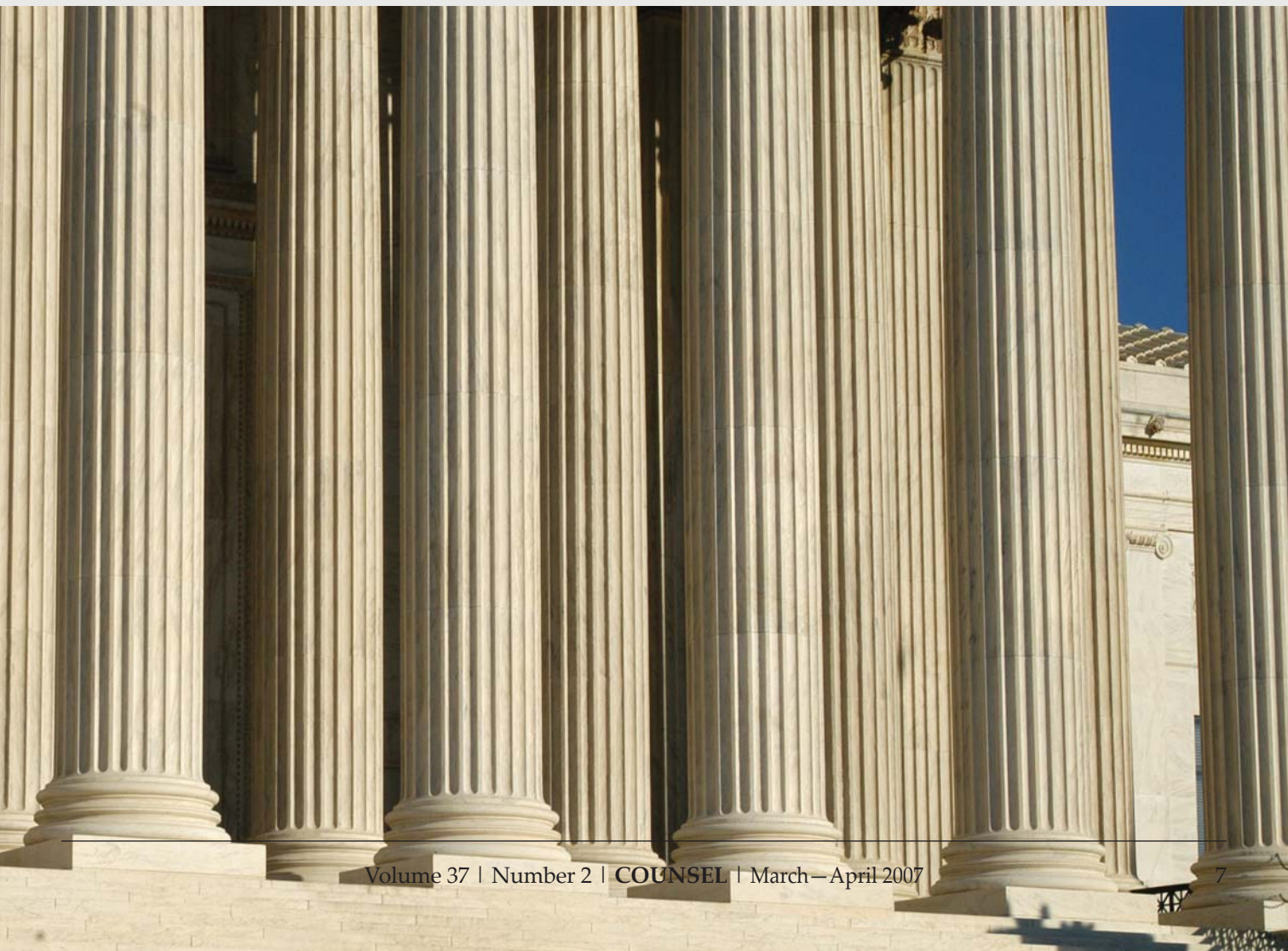
Conclusion, vv. 12-13

The promises to the overcomer are now given in glowing terms. Each individual who overcomes in these circumstances of persecution will become *"a pillar in the temple of my God."* The pillar speaks of honor and importance as, in Galatians 2, James, Peter and John *"seemed to be pillars"*. Pillars in ancient temples were strongly constructed to give security and permanence to the edifice and in many places where temples have been destroyed the pillars alone still stand! Pillars were often decorated and inscribed and the overcomer as a pillar will bear three inscriptions. These are i) *"the name of my God"*; ii) *"the name of the city"*; and, iii) *"my new name"*. In the heavenly temple these believers will be conspicuous, beautiful and strong, and in contrast to their constant evacuations from Phil-

adelphia will go out no more. They will dwell in permanent safety and have a very special relationship with God and His Christ. The final appeal is to those then living in Philadelphia and to us today, to hear, accept, understand and act upon the advice given in this letter. May we be able to do so and join those beloved saints from *"the city of brotherly love"* in their recompense and reward.

We know that He has promised to come for us in the rapture; that He will keep us out of the great tribulation; that He will reward our feeble efforts with the glory of the overcomer. In the light of such awareness we must use our best endeavors to live faithfully for Him in this scene of His rejection.

Roy Hill
Bristol, U. K.



What's in a Name?

A name gives identity and may indicate character, such as a grocery store or a Baptist Church. Names are given to babies to identify them, to differentiate them from other babies. The name will be used for personal purposes and also for legal identification.

But names were also used at times to describe the person or his work.

God said to Abram, *"No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations"* (Gen. 17:5 NKJV). Abraham means "the father of many." In times past a name might describe a person's occupation such as "miller" or "smith."

Churches take names that are descriptive and identify a denomination, such as Baptist or Presbyterian. The Baptists stress believers' baptism by immersion and the Presbyterians have a board of elders to govern the church. The name indicates a belief or practice.

During the early 1800's there was a revival in England and Ireland in following the simplicity of the apostolic church. These believers decided they would take only the names found in Scripture, such as "believers," "brethren," "saints" and "Christians." Such names would emphasize the unity of God's family. Denominationalism was dividing God's people and they were determined to emphasize the unity of the true church. All who truly believe are members of that church and should be received as such.

These Christians also decided to use scriptural terms for their gatherings. They called their congregations "assemblies" rather than "churches." This was a more accurate translation of the Greek word *ekklesia* and many of them were Greek scholars (Cf. Acts 19:39). In common use, the word "church" often meant a denomination or a building. These believers were careful to distinguish between the building and the body of Christians that met in the building.

The word "assembly" was more definitive. One day the universal assembly made up of all believers will be complete, *"the general assembly and church [ekklesia] of the firstborn*

their meetings. They were careful not to describe these buildings with names that describe the assembly, which is made up of living people. Many called their buildings "halls," which certainly distinguished the building from the assembly which met in it. The geographical location might be added to the name.

Later some local assemblies began calling their buildings "chapels." The name "hall" was associated with some secular groups such as labour unions and also used by the Jehovah's Witnesses; a sect with which they would not want to be confused. However, in recent years the term "chapel" has become popular with

These believers were careful to distinguish between the building and the body of Christians that met in the building.

who are registered in heaven" (Heb. 12:23). But while here on earth believers are to meet in local assemblies for teaching, fellowship, the Lord's supper and prayer. The local assembly is described as *"a house of God"* (1 Tim. 3:15), *"a temple of God"* (1 Cor. 3:16), *"a body of Christ"* (1 Cor. 12:27), *"an assembly"* (1 Thess. 1:1), and a *"flock"* (Acts 20:28). None of these terms describe a building of stone but a living congregation of God's people.

In time, many of these early assemblies acquired buildings for

many church groups. Meeting in a chapel no longer identifies a group as to its beliefs.

The assemblies used to be careful to distinguish between the building and the assembly. But congregations are getting careless in their use of terms. Now the building may be called "the church" and the meeting room a "sanctuary," a term belonging to the tabernacle and temple of the old covenant (Ex. 25:8, 1 Chron. 22:19). There may be a desire to avoid seeming to be different and to blend into the ecclesiastical com-

To use biblical terms accurately is important. It will reflect correct thinking concerning the assembly, its nature and its destiny.

munity around them. Now believers may talk of building a “new church” when they are referring to a new building.

This reflects sloppy thinking, poor theology concerning the assembly because of the common use of the term “church.” If it is used, it should refer to the congregation, not a building. But the term “assembly” is more accurate, referring to people, not bricks and mortar. A building may be named with a biblical term such as Bethany Chapel or Grace Chapel or Gospel Hall. Others may choose to name a building by the location, such as Northside Bible Chapel.

To use biblical terms accurately is important. It will reflect correct thinking concerning the assembly, its nature and its destiny. Christ *“loved the church [assembly] and gave Himself for her”* (Eph. 5:25). May God’s people today also love her.

Donald L. Norbie
Greeley, Colorado

He Leadeth Me

In “green pastures”? Not always; sometimes He
Who knowest best, in kindness leadeth me
In weary ways, where heavy shadows be.
Out of the sunshine, warm and soft and bright,
Out of the sunshine into darkest night,
I oft would faint with sorrows and affright,
Only for this: I know He holds my hand;
So, whether led in green or desert land,
I trust, although I may not understand.

Beside “still waters”? No, not always so;
Ofttimes the heavy tempests ‘round me blow,
And o’er my soul the waves and billows go.
But when the storms beat loudest, and I cry
Aloud for help, the Master standeth by,
And whispers to my soul, “Lo, it is I.”
Above the tempest wild I hear Him say:
“Beyond this darkness lies the perfect day;
In every path of thine I lead the way.”

So whether on the hill-tops high and fair
I dwell, or in the sunless valleys where
The shadows lie, what matter? He is there.
And more than this; where’er the pathway lead,
He gives to me no helpless, broken reed,
But His own hand, sufficient for my need.

—Henry H. Barry

How Shall We Then Sing?



"Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable" (Ps. 145:3).

Our great God desires to see His people join their voices together in praising Him. Christian singing should always be considered in this light. Certainly singing makes up part of our corporate worship; that blood-bought privilege we all have in Christ because of His work on the cross. Christian singing was never meant by God to be an entertainment for our souls and minds. The Scriptures of truth have clear guidelines for us as to how we should practice singing praises to our God.

The mode

Since singing is part of worship, it should be rendered in reverence and holy fear before our God, *"Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness; fear before Him, all the earth" (Ps. 96:9). "Honor and majesty are before*

Him; strength and beauty are in His sanctuary" (Ps. 96:6). Again David, the sweet psalmist, would say "As for me I will come to thy house in the multitude of thy mercy, and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple" (Ps. 5:7). This is reverential fear and has nothing to do with being fearful in God's presence. But it has to do with holding God up in honour and glory. "Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness" (Ps. 29:2)

The attitude

We need to be singing in a spirit of submission to our Lord. So while bowing our hearts before Him, we lift Him up as we humble ourselves before Him. *"Oh, come, let us worship and bow down before Him; let us kneel before our maker" (Ps. 95:6). Although physically bowing and kneeling may not be possible or necessary, yet a heart's attitude of humility is essential. There should be no room in our worshipful singing for hilarity, unholily familiarity or anything that caters to the flesh or that brings about carnal self-gratification of any sort.*

Scriptural basis

A common saying among God's people is "Hymnology is not theology". There is some truth to this saying in the sense that we do not get our sound doctrine from hymns. Yet, unfortunately, this has been used as an excuse for writing poorly thought out and glibly written lyrics for a lot of hymns and choruses. The assumption is that it does not really matter what words we sing! Thus the believers have been deceived into accepting a status of mediocrity in our "hymnology" to justify bad lyrics. Some of the so-called old hymns and arguably the majority of the new ones are often scripturally

unsound, dispensationally wrong or worse still, irreverent in their context. The Word of God teaches clearly that lyrics used for hymns should be scripturally based. *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16). Therefore those who have the responsibility of writing lyrics for hymns and spiritual songs should have the Word of God richly dwelling in their hearts, modifying their lives and impacting their thinking. For only then would they be able to produce words that are as close to the Scriptures as possible. For out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks. And herein lays their protection from making unnecessary errors.*

The value of scripturally-based hymns is further emphasized in that they will be profitable for teaching, admonishing and edifying the assembly. These are serious goals and should be taken up by the believers as a responsibility towards one another. Note that entertainment and carnal satisfaction are not part of the functions of singing with grace to the Lord.

Words or tunes

The importance of sound wording of hymns over good tunes is further emphasized by the Scriptures. That is not denying that we should use good tunes. Paul writes to the Corinthians: *"What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also; I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also" (1 Cor. 14:15). The word "spirit" does not refer to the Holy Spirit here, but to the believer's own spirit. As it is unthinkable that a true child of God could pray with-*

out his spirit and without thinking, it should be equally unthinkable to sing without the spirit and without thinking. Singing as praying should be an exercise of our spirits, not of our souls or our bodies, and we need to be thinking of the meaning of the words as we sing them. We are prone to fall into two different errors in this regard. One is to treat singing in such a casual manner and end up making it an exercise of soul

Lord" (Eph. 5:19). So apart from the beneficial influences of sound singing on the assembly, the Lord and His glory should be first and foremost in our minds while we sing.

Recently there has been a growing tendency among hymnwriters to write words which lead believers to be occupied with themselves. This may be of some value in certain situations where there is need for correction, or for admonishing one

in the midst of the church [assembly] will I sing praises unto Thee" (Heb. 2:12). These are the words of our blessed Lord Jesus. The Redeemer is the unseen leader of His redeemed ones in worship and praise to His Father. What need do we have for human teams to lead us? Have we lost sight of His central place in our meetings? Or are we in such a low spiritual state that we need musical instruments and human voices to artificially induce us to worship?

Furthermore, do we not recognize the role of the Holy Spirit in glorifying Christ in our midst? Is He not responsible for showing us the things of Christ (John 16:13)? If indeed the goal of our praise and worship is to glorify Christ, should we not trust the blessed Spirit to lead us to do so? Certainly for practical reasons and to maintain order in the house of God, we rely on a brother with some musical talent to start our singing, but surely we have no need of a human instrument to merely stir emotions which we call worship. Do we not recognize that as "sons", God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our heart whereby we cry Abba Father? The Spirit is the One who leads our genuine cry of love, praise and worship to our Father.

In conclusion, beloved, the Scriptures teach us that the gracious work of God in adopting us into His family was to the end that we should be to the praise of the glory of His grace (Eph. 1:5-6). Let us strive to make our praise acceptable to Him. And *"Let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and fear. For our God is a consuming fire"* (Heb. 12:28).

Apart from the beneficial influences of sound singing on the assembly, the Lord and His glory should be first and foremost in our minds while we sing.

or body. The other is to sing in a mechanical fashion not paying any attention to the words. It is worse still if we cannot even discern the words because they are drowned by loud music. Music indeed is a very powerful force and plays a relatively important part in Christian singing. We are not going to discuss styles or types of music now used in Christian singing in this article, but suffice to say that if I cannot understand the words because of overwhelming music, then I am not rendering to the Lord true scriptural praise. Therefore music should take a secondary role to lyrics in our singing so that we may be able to sing with the understanding.

Unto the Lord

Scriptural singing should be to the Lord (Col. 3:16). We are to ascribe greatness, glory and majesty to Him alone. *"Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the*

another. But if all we end up singing about what revolves around "me", "my needs", "my blessings" or "my dreams and ambitions", then we have missed the mark altogether. Undue occupation with self results in making our singing an exercise of the soul not the spirit and it causes us to deny the Lord His due honour and glory.

Using worship teams

Another new trend that is rapidly spreading among certain local churches is the use of so-called worship teams. A team of men and women, usually using loud musical instruments, is asked to lead the "worship" of the entire congregation. They are supposed to sing as a means, as they claim, of bringing the people into the presence of God and heightening their desire to worship Him.

The Bible, on the other hand, recognizes only One leader of the worship and praise of the believers. *"I will declare Thy name unto my brethren;*

Dr. Boushra Mikhael
Toronto, Ontario

Preterism Examined

Reformed theology has long argued for a variety of Amillennial views concerning prophecy. However, since the 1970's, a theologically dangerous viewpoint called Preterism has begun to gain influence and popularity in Reformed circles. Preterism, although first propounded by Roman Catholic scholars five hundred years ago, is experiencing a new wave of interest these days, due to the encouragement of popular radio personalities such as R.C. Sproul and Hank Hanegraaff. Sproul openly admits he is a "partial Preterist" espousing his views in his book The Last Days According to Jesus. Hank Hanegraaff, host of the radio program "Bible Answer Man" and president of Christian Research Institute, has defended some Preterist positions on recent broadcasts. At the heart of the Preterist view is the notion that Jesus returned in A.D. 70 when the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem.

What is Preterism?

The term Preterist is the Latin word for "past." Preterists believe that all the major events of Bible prophecy have already occurred. Therefore, they view the major prophetic passages of Scripture, such as the Olivet Discourse and the book of Revelation, as being already fulfilled. Preterism is the exact opposite of Premillennialism, which views these prophecies as yet to be fulfilled in the future.

Moderate Preterists, such as R.C. Sproul, claim they believe in a future second coming, but still insist on interpreting the Olivet Discourse and the book of Revelation as basically already fulfilled in the past. As a result, they reject such basic concepts as: (1) the rapture of the church; (2) a literal seven-year tribulation period; (3) a literal Antichrist; (4) the conversion of Israel; (5) the Battle of Armageddon; (6) a 1000-year millennium; (7) the future binding of Satan.

In contrast to the basic beliefs of pre-tribulational Premillennialism, moderate Preterists believe that God is finished with biblical Israel. They see no prophetic future for national Israel. The fact that the State of Israel exists today is blamed on "ignorant premillennialists" who supported the Balfour Declaration, which eventually led to the formation of the modern nation of Israel in 1948. While most Preterists would insist they are not anti-Semitic, their theology certainly leans in that direction.

The History of Preterism

This view was first developed in the late 1500's by a Jesuit friar named Luis de Alcazar (1554-1613). His purpose was to defend the Catholic church against the attacks of the Protestant Reformers. He denied the Reformers' charge that the book of Revelation was a prophecy about the apostasy of the Roman church. Instead, he argued that Revelation

concerned itself with the church's struggles during its early years. Chapters 4-11, he stated, were interpreted as depicting the church's fight against Judaism, culminating in the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Chapters 12-19 were viewed as the church's struggle against paganism, ending with the fall of Rome in A.D. 476. Chapters 20 through 22 were interpreted to be a symbolic description of the glories of papal Rome. Using this clever approach, Alcazar was able to limit the range of Revelation's prophecies to the first 500 years of church history.

However, a more radical form of Preterism gained popularity in the latter part of the twentieth century and is today the most widely-held version of this interpretive approach. This approach sees nearly all the prophecies of Revelation as fulfilled prior to A.D. 70 at the destruction of Jerusalem, except for the resurrection of believers and the second coming of Jesus Christ. It assigns the tribulation to the fall of Israel, the great apostasy to the first-century church, and the last days to the period between Jesus' ascension and the destruction of Jerusalem. The Beast is viewed as a symbol of Nero in particular and of the Roman Empire in general. The false prophet is equated with the leadership of apostate Israel. Needless to say, anti-Semitism is common among Preterists.

Preterist Beliefs

Moderate Preterists link their belief system to a Reformed view of prophecy in which the church becomes the new "Israel" and must bring in the Kingdom on earth in order to prepare the world for the return of Christ. Most Preterists believe the following:

1 Nero was the Antichrist or Beast. There will be no future individual Antichrist.

2 The tribulation period is already past. It occurred when the Roman army besieged Jerusalem in A.D. 66-70.

3 Christ "returned" in the clouds in A.D. 70 to witness the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman army.

4 God replaced Old Testament Israel with the church. Therefore, all the biblical promises to Israel belong to the church.

5 Armageddon already happened in A.D. 70. The fall of "Babylon" refers to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

6 Satan is already bound in the abyss and cannot hinder the spread of the gospel. Revelation 20 has already been fulfilled.

7 We are already in the millennium, but it is not literal. Some Preterists equate the entire church age to the millennium. The 1,000 years are not literal but figurative, even though they are mentioned 6 times in Revelation 20.

Preterist Assumptions Examined

The basic assumptions of Preterism rest on passages that refer to Christ coming "quickly" (ie., suddenly) (Rev. 1:1), or passages such as "this generation will not pass" (Matt. 24:34). They insist that, because of these passages, the Lord's coming must be related to and limited to the first century. By contrast, Premillennialists believe that Christ's coming is imminent and, therefore, could occur at any moment. Allow

us to examine two passages which Preterists frequently marshal in support of their position: Matthew 24:34 and 16:28.

"Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." (Matt. 24:34)

The word generation should be interpreted in light of the phrase "all these things". Careful Bible teachers have countered the Preterist view by observing that the generation which sees the Olivet birth pangs will be the same generation which sees the birth. In looking at this verse in this way, the "generation" of which the Lord was speaking was a future, "last days" generation. Jesus was telling His disciples that the generation that sees the beginning of the these things, will also see its end. When the signs come, they will proceed quickly; they will not drag on for many generations. It will happen within a generation.

"Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom" (Matt. 16:28).

The disciples saw the very coming and glory of the Son of Man in His kingdom when He was transfigured (Matt. 17:1-8). This was a preview of Christ in the glory of His future kingdom. However, we are permitted by Scripture to view the transfiguration of Christ as the coming kingdom in miniature? It seems that Peter understood it in this way, for he writes: "...the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory...when we were

with Him in the holy mount" (2 Pet. 1:16-18). Bible commentator William MacDonald explains:

"Are we justified in looking upon Christ's transfiguration as a pre-picture or miniature of His coming kingdom? Yes, we are. This is made abundantly clear in 2 Peter 1:16-18. There Peter is describing his experience with Christ on the mount. There can be no doubt that he is referring to the Mount of Transfiguration...the power and coming refer to His second advent."¹

TWO HERMENEUTICAL PROBLEMS

A. Date of the Book of Revelation

For the prophecies of Revelation to fit into the Roman conquest of Jerusalem, it is necessary for the date of the writing of Revelation to have been prior to A.D. 70. The language of Revelation is predictive; therefore, its prophecies look forward to fulfillment, not backwards. Therefore, most scholars place the writing of Revelation at about A.D. 95. Bible scholar Mark Hitchcock explains:

"While Preterism has many weaknesses, the Achilles' heel of this view is the early date the proponents assign to the book of Revelation. The external evidence for a late date of Revelation (A.D. 95) is overwhelming..."²

B. Nero as the Antichrist?

Hank Hanegraff writes:

"Nero is rightly identified as the Beast of Revelation—the archetypal Antichrist—because of the unique and horrible quality of the 'Great Tribulation' he ignited. The horror of the great tribulation included not only the destruction of

Jerusalem and the temple, but the persecution of the apostles and prophets who penned the Scriptures and formed the foundation of the Christian Church."³

Joining Hank Hanegraff, most Preterists go to great lengths to show that the Roman Emperor Nero was the antichrist of Revelation 13. However, does Nero fulfill the many details given concerning the Beast throughout Scripture? A careful reading of Scripture shows that Nero falls far short of the biblical standard. Ignoring the rest of Scripture for the moment, the book of Revelation alone reveals the following aspects concerning the Beast: (1) Literally killed and resurrected (Rev. 13:3); (2) Globally rules over every tribe and nation (Rev. 13:7); (3) Has a high-profile accomplice who performs literal miracles (13:13); (4) An image of the Beast is given the breath of life (Rev. 13:15). Were any of these true of Nero? Not one! Finally, Nero was already dead when John penned the book of Revelation at about A.D. 95. Clearly, Nero is unable to meet the biblical description of the Antichrist or Beast of Revelation.

Practical Implications

Destroys the Literal Meaning of the Bible.

Once you start arguing that the language of prophecy cannot be taken literally, you are not that far removed from failing to take the rest of the Bible literally. Preterists are following the dangerous path of nineteenth century liberalism, which began denying predictive prophecy and soon rejected the literal interpretation of the doctrines of creation, the virgin birth of

Christ, His vicarious death and His resurrection.

Diminishes the Hope of the Believer.

The Bible warns us: "*there shall come scoffers in the last days saying, where is the promise of his coming*" (2 Pet. 3:3-4). Preterism sets aside the biblical commands to "*watch*" and "*be ready*" for the coming of Christ. It limits those commands to the first century believers prior to A.D. 70. With this in mind, how do we celebrate the Lord's Supper which "*shows forth the Lord's death until He comes*" (1 Cor. 11:26)? Is the phrase "*until He comes*" to be limited to A.D. 70? Are we to stop celebrating the Lord's Supper because He already came in A.D. 70?

Every Christian should be concerned about the spread of Preterism. Historically, no prophetic view has more insidious implications than Preterism. It was the poison which spread German rationalism and liberalism into many once-vigorous evangelical denominations. May every Christian seek to equip himself to defend the Scriptures from this subtle attack.

Endnotes

1. William MacDonald, *Matthew: Behold Your King*, (Kansas City: Walterick, 1974), p. 197-198.
2. Mark Hitchcock, *The End Times Controversy: The Stake in the Heart—AD 95 Date of Revelation*, (Eugene: Harvest House, 2003), p. 150.
3. Hank Hanegraff, *Who is the Antichrist?*, Christian Research Journal, Vol. 28, Number 01, 2005.

David Dunlap
Land 'O Lakes, Florida

The POWER of an ASSEMBLY

The church was birthed in an age of rank paganism, Pharisaic legalism, and anti-Christ Judaism. The church did not possess the resources needed to succeed, as it had neither monetary, military, political, nor religious clout. The infant church was but a small gathering of disciples, most of whom were uneducated; their only training was that they had been with Jesus. Yet within a few short years, without any modern means of transportation and communication, thousands were saved and scores of local churches were established in various parts of the world.

“When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31).

Paul the apostle, in only about a six-year period involving two missionary trips and thousands of miles, saw local assemblies for Christ established in four major provinces of the Roman Empire. These were in Galatia (Turkey), Achaia (Greece), Macedonia (Europe), and Asia Minor (part of Turkey). Quite an achievement even by today's standards!

We ask the question, where did the

power come from to affect this massive growth of the church? Basically one entity—the Holy Spirit! *“But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you”* (Acts 1:8). The risen Lord, through the same Spirit who created the world and who raised Him from the dead, miraculously built His church by a variety of gifts and means, against all human odds.

While not trying to match the statistics or to use the methods God used with the early church and thus put God in a box, there are three main areas of the Holy Spirit's work that were the power then and still

prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31). In the church's battle against the devil and his powers, we are exhorted to be *“praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit”* (Eph. 6:18).

Prayer in the energy of the Spirit is simple, but it is also hard work. There is no glory to self. It is the only link to God's power. In spite of this, many local churches have a hard time getting Christians to come together to pray.

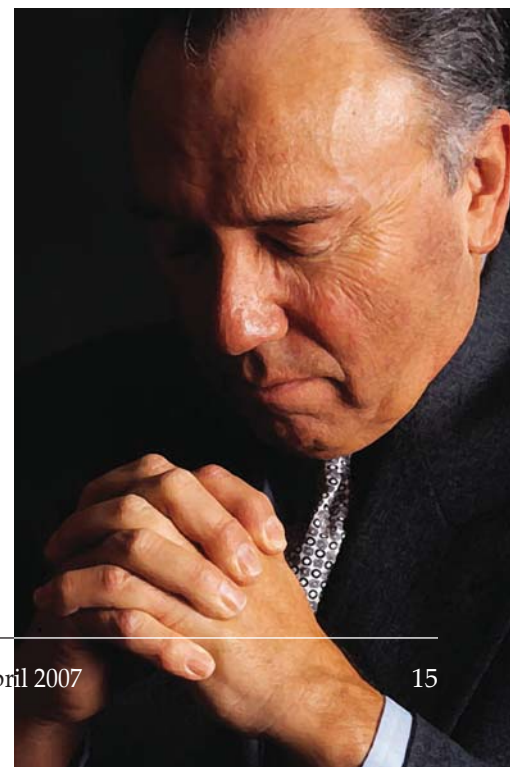
Preaching the Word

Through the apostles the early church did not offer philosophy, psychology, or political theories in order to change the world. They

are the true power for any believer or local assembly. They are: prayer in the Spirit, preaching the Word of the Spirit, and purity in the life of a Spirit-filled believer.

Prayer

The early church was a praying church. They prayed in the power of the Holy Spirit and showed their complete dependence on God and God alone for power. *“When they had*



preached the pure Word of God, the holy Scriptures. We are told that *"they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word"* (Acts 8:4), and that the early assembly *"spoke the word of God with boldness"* (Acts 4:31). They knew that the power to change lives lay not in their theories, but in the Spirit-inspired Word. *"For the word of*

gifted preaching of the pure Word in its proper context (rightly divided), and therefore to stick to the Word and only the Word.

Purity in the Life

Paul, the apostle, reveals the power that caused a great awakening and resulted in an assembly

Since it is the Holy Spirit who is the church's power, we must be aware of the one thing that grieves (short circuits) the power of the Spirit. Ephesians 4 teaches that sin is what grieves *"the Holy Spirit of God."* This is illustrated for us in 1 Corinthians. The Corinthian church had written to Paul for advice on money matters, marriage, spiritual gifts, and the eating of meats. However, before Paul ever dealt with any of those issues (ch. 7-16), he addressed a problem in the church that they hadn't mentioned—the sin of fighting and division in the assembly and the sin of immorality (ch. 1-6). He commanded that sin must first be dealt with and judged in the church.

Another vivid lesson on how sin will cause an assembly to lose power is found in Joshua 8. The children of Israel were able to defeat their enemies against incredible odds by the power of Jehovah. But because one man had sinned, when they came up against the weak city of Ai, they were soundly defeated. The power of the Lord had left them because of sin. The power did not return until that sin was put away.

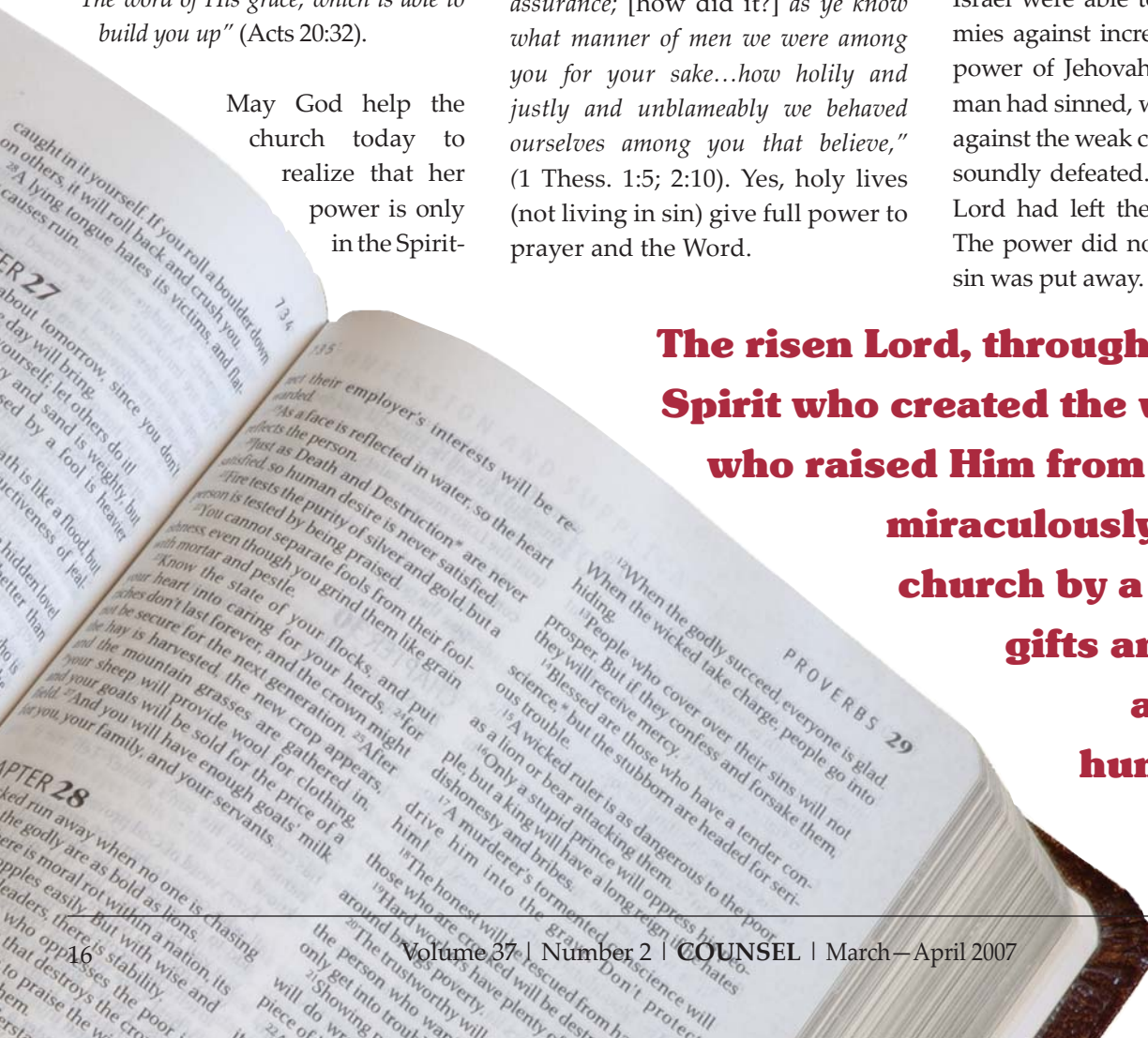
Without any modern means of transportation and communication, thousands were saved and scores of local churches were established in various parts of the world.

God is quick [life-giving], and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12). *"The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"* (Eph. 6:17). *"The word of His grace, which is able to build you up"* (Acts 20:32).

May God help the church today to realize that her power is only in the Spirit-

being planted in Thessalonica as he states, *"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; [how did it?] as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake...how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe,"* (1 Thess. 1:5; 2:10). Yes, holy lives (not living in sin) give full power to prayer and the Word.

The risen Lord, through the same Spirit who created the world and who raised Him from the dead, miraculously built His church by a variety of gifts and means, against all human odds.



Many Christians today blame the weakness of the church on everything from the preachers to the program. It might very well be that sinful and worldly lives are the problem.

A revival is needed from God in each church that has lowered itself to become an entertainment center, or a social club, or “non offensive” to keep the numbers high. Instead of prayer, preaching, and purity being given the primary place, many churches attempt to grow by the pseudo powers of money, methods, and modern education. That is, they collect much money and have beautiful building and entertaining Christian programs. They use all kinds of methods based on corporate business strategy to succeed, such as using only the trained professional and highly educated people to teach the flock. Sometimes the numbers of “members” may be high, but where is the power of quality, holy, and biblical living that brings glory to God?

God’s way is through the power of the Holy Spirit by prayer, preaching, and purity. Simple? Yes. Does it involve the wisdom of man? No. This has always been God’s “formula” for success. It worked in the early church and it still works now.

A Spirit-filled life
that is living in purity
+ Laying hold of God
in fervent and continuing prayer
for open doors and hearts
+ Preaching the Word
with boldness
= True spiritual blessing
as God works through you.

May each local assembly never lose sight of her true power.

**A Spirit-filled life
that is living
in purity**



**Laying hold of God
in fervent
and continuing
prayer for open
doors and hearts**



**Preaching
the Word
with boldness**



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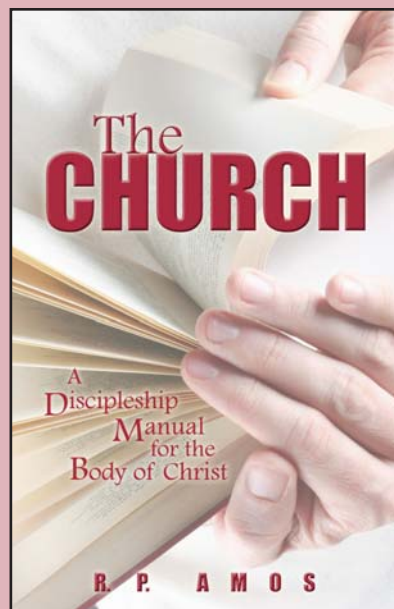
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Rochester, New York

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**The Church:
A Discipleship Manual for the
Body of Christ**
R. P. Amos

This study manual is designed for disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ who are serious about serving Him. It deals with the subject of God’s church and answers, from the Word of God, many questions Christians ask concerning the assembly (church) of God’s New Testament children.

As believers, we are to base our actions and beliefs on the written Word of God – our beliefs as to the gospel we have trusted, who Jesus is, moral absolutes, etc. Why is it, though, that so many feel, when it comes to the church, it suddenly becomes optional how to do it? Why do people believe that man’s modern ideas plus centuries of tradition can be more successful than God’s pattern? If God has revealed truth for the church, why shouldn’t that be obeyed also in simple faith?

Thus, this manual will deal with the operation of the church and how a disciple functions within it — according to the authority of the holy Word of God alone.

Hezekiah Part 3

2 Chronicles 30

Chapter 29 ends on a note of joy and rejoicing, and well it might, for the chapter has recorded days of revival amongst the people of God. Hezekiah having witnessed that could easily have concluded that his work was now completed. At his direction priests and Levites were installed in their appointed spheres of service, and he might have felt that the responsibility for the spiritual well-being of the people had passed into their hands. Others might have been tempted to think like that but not Hezekiah. This man desired to see a total recovery, a return to the “old paths”.

The Passover

One thing now occupied the mind of Hezekiah, namely, the celebration of the Passover, the annual commemorative feast of the nations deliverance from Egypt, and a very powerful expression of the peoples national and corporate unity. The feast was initially instituted in Exodus 12, before the actual Passover night took place, and in that respect has certain parallels to the Lord's Supper instituted by the Lord Jesus on the night He was betrayed, before His death took place. If the celebration of the Passover was an expression of national unity, so likewise the Lord's Supper is a very practical expression of the corporate unity of a local assembly.

The problems

In desiring to see the celebration of the Passover according to the pattern of former days, Hezekiah was

faced with two difficulties.

First, the appointed date for keeping the Passover, the fourteenth day of the first month was already past. On that particular day neither the priests nor the people were ready to celebrate the feast (see v. 3).

Secondly, Hezekiah was king of Judah only. In the days of King Re-

but that there was a scriptural precedence for it in Numbers 9. There provision was made for it to be celebrated on the fourteenth day of the second month. That addition being made because according to Numbers 9:6 there were “*certain men, who were defiled by the dead body of a man.*” It was not that they had wilfully

If the celebration of the Passover was an expression of national unity, so likewise the Lord's Supper is a very practical expression of the corporate unity of a local assembly.

hoboam division had taken place, but Hezekiah's desire was that all Israel might keep the feast. He believed that whether remnants of the Northern kingdom, or subjects of his own kingdom, they were all God's people, that there was but one true centre of gathering, and that the Passover celebration was intended for all the Lord's people. Do we have any similar exercise respecting believers who are separated from us as far as their pattern of gathering is concerned, a desire to see them gathering to the name of the Lord? How did Hezekiah address these problems?

The proposition

In regard to the appointed date, verse 2 says: “*The king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the Passover in the second month.*” It is important to appreciate that this was not some new innovation, introduced for their own convenience,

neglected to observe it, but circumstances were such, they had been ceremonially defiled and in consequence disqualified from keeping the feast before God. In gracious condescension, the Lord appointed the fourteenth day of the second month as one on which such could celebrate the Passover, so giving opportunity for them to be cleansed in the intervening period. But while the date was conceded there were no concessions to the way in which the Passover was to be celebrated, instead all was to be done according to the initial pattern. But there was a modification to the date, the provision of divine grace, to minister to weakness and failure amongst the people, and Hezekiah took advantage of it. In seeking to apply the lesson, particularly in respect of the Lord's Supper, we certainly should not think that we have licence to modify the divine pattern regarding the Supper, nor the place where, or the day when, it

is to be kept, but it should remind us that if on examination of ourselves (1 Cor. 11:28) we find some personal unfitness to partake of the Supper, the same God who was gracious to those in Israel who confessed their unfitness to partake of the Passover, is the same One who is gracious to those who, conscious of some failure, are ready to make confession of it in the present day.

In regard to the problem regarding the people, verse 1 says: *"And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover unto the LORD God of Israel"*. As well as sending to Judah, without compromising divine truth, he sought to raise a testimony to those who had been separated from Judah through division. Is that not something we should seek to do in regard to those who gather in the denominations? The letter He-

zekiah wrote is recorded in verses 5-9. In verse 5 they issued a decree, the focal point being that the Passover might be kept *"as it was written"* and it was concluded with an assurance that if they returned to God He would be gracious and merciful to them (v. 9). It was a letter written in a fine spirit and sent to brethren that were separated from them. Do we know believers who gather in the denominations? Have we ever thought of commending to them gathering unto the Name of the Lord? But as we contemplate outreach of this kind we might well

feel that such an approach will not be readily welcome, it wasn't too welcome with some here (v. 10), but that didn't stop Hezekiah. Though it was true that some laughed, the effort was not without divine blessing (v. 11), and it was an exercise owned by the Lord (v. 12).

The purification.

Before the actual Passover was kept, there was the removal of all that was inconsistent with it (v. 14) and in the chapter there is an emphasis on the need for sanctification. In verse 15 we read about priests and Levites who were ashamed. We are not specifically told why, but it is inferred that it was linked to the need to sanctify themselves. Did the enthusiasm of the congregation in verse 13 put them to shame, exposing their own failure to respond to the revival in sanctifying themselves for service?

Paul does say of the Corinthians, *"your zeal hath provoked many"* (2

receiving into fellowship, albeit in good faith, some who could later prove to be either morally or doctrinally unfit? It is, we must admit, possible, even though the elders exercise much care in this matter. Does the possibility of that danger mean that such a venture is best left alone? Surely that would not be right. But if the situation did arise then we would need to do what Hezekiah did. He didn't reject them, the very fact they had humbled themselves, and had come, indicated that their heart and desires were right, but then neither did he turn a blind eye to their sin. First he prayed for them (vv. 18-19), and the Lord was not indifferent to his prayer (v. 20). Secondly, he saw that they received teaching, inferred in verse 22 *"And Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the LORD"*.

The period

Following the feast of Passover, they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days (vv. 13, 21). Do not miss the fact that although the Passover was celebrated one month later than the original date, the feast of unleavened bread was still kept for the following appointed seven days.

While the Passover feast is typical of the redemptive work of Christ, the Feast of Unleavened Bread portrays the holy life that ought to characterize those that are redeemed. So satisfying was it, they decided to keep seven other days (v. 23). Nothing like it had been seen for something like 250 years (v. 26), (see 2 Chron. 7:9), and it began with one man, Hezekiah, a man who had a heart for all the people of God.

In the days of King Rehoboam division had taken place, but Hezekiah's desire was that all Israel might keep the feast.

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Cor. 9:2). Have we an enthusiasm and commitment that is likely to have that kind of effect on others?

Then there were some in the congregation that had not sanctified themselves, and yet they ate of the Passover (vv. 17-18). The outreach to the northern kingdom had brought people into Judah, to partake of the feast, but not everything was entirely right with them. Some might say couldn't that happen in regard to the local assembly if we made an effort to reach those in the denominations?

Might we not stand in danger of

Richard Catchpole
London, UK

Glorious Mystery

Oh glorious mystery of Love,
That I, a child of earth,
May dwell by faith with Christ above,
The Lamb of matchless worth!

My feet must tread earth's lowly way,
But on faith's wings I soar
To view that Land of Endless Day,
My home forevermore.

Though earth-bound for a little time,
My ransomed spirit sees
The glory which shall soon be mine
Within the Heavenlies.

So patiently I wait the day
When I shall be set free,
And leave this mortal house of clay
For all eternity.

To dwell within His Presence blest,
Who by His matchless grace
Hath brought me into Heavenly Rest,
There to behold His face.

—A. B. Christiansen