



TOWARD THE MARK

*“I PRESS TOWARD THE MARK FOR THE PRIZE
OF THE HIGH CALLING OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS.”
PHILIPPIANS 3:14*

*A MAGAZINE FOR YOUNG CHRISTIANS
OF ALL AGES*

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Dear Reader,

"Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps" I Peter 2:21;

"he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" I John 2:6.

Being saved and having peace with God, I now need a pattern to walk by as I go through this world on my way to glory; and the same blessed Person through whom I have pardon and peace becomes my pattern.

We become more and more like what we are occupied with. If we are occupied with the world, we become worldly: if with ourselves, selfish - but being occupied with Christ, we become Christ-like.

We Christian know too little about meditation upon the person of our Lord. If more of our time to be spent in quietly thinking of Him instead of only in asking for things from Him. if we to search the Word daily to learn of Him instead of looking only for things that we think might immediately help us in our own concerns. the more we "consider Christ Jesus" the more we learn of Him and the more we behold Him, the more we become like Him.

I trust that you will enjoy the great articles in this issue during the summer months. It is our prayer that the Lord would use them for building you up on your most holy faith and help you to be established. Thank you for your e-mails and notes of encouragement.

Please keep praying for the Lord's blessing on Toward the Mark.

Yours in our soon-coming Lord,

Emil S. Nashed

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Quotations from Scripture are generally taken either from the King James translation or the J.N. Darby translation.

MILK

"The truth shall make you free"

OPENING UP THINGS WITH GOD

The book of Acts describes several instances of things that God opened up. In this study we will briefly consider eight verses in the New Testament about these things. The English verb "to open" (Gr. *anoígō*) occurs quite often: 77 or 7 x 11 times, whereas the associated noun (Gr. *ánoixis*) is found only once (Eph. 6:19). The Greek compound verb (*dianoígō*) has the preposition "dia" as a prefix and this verb is used in seven different forms, found eight times in total in the New Testament. It means a thorough or complete opening up. May this happen to us, while studying and contemplating God's Word, that the Lord may open it up and that, as a result, our hearts may open wider to Him! It is interesting to note that seven of these eight occurrences are found in Luke's writings, but the first one is in Mark.

(1) The Opening of the Ears

"And they bring to Him a deaf man who could not speak right, and they beseech Him that He might lay His hand on him. And having taken him away from the crowd apart, He put His fingers to his ears; and having spit, He touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven He groaned, and says to him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And immediately his ears were opened, and the band of his tongue was loosed and he spoke right" (Mk. 7:32-35). "Be opened" (v.34) represents one of the seven forms in which the verb *dianoígō* occurs. How fitting it is that this should be the first occurrence in the series of eight! At this point, an application can be made to all Christians: before we were saved we were sinners and enemies of God, not able to hear God's voice. In the incident just quoted, we may observe the actions that were needed to enable us to listen to His voice.

1. First, the Lord had to come down. This tremendous stoop is described in Philippians 2:5-8 and 2 Corinthians 8:9; without this stoop we would be lost, forever.
2. Then the Lord identified with the deaf man – a lost sinner – by putting His hand upon him. Thus, Christ identified with us in our need (and similarly, the Lord will identify with the Jewish remnant in days to come). By the grace of God, all those who are saved can say, "The Lord put His hand on me." But for Him this meant, ultimately, the death of the cross! On our side, through faith, we identify with His cross, as Paul learned to do (Gal. 2:20).
3. "He took him aside from the multitude." The Lord acted this way because of His public rejection by the nation of Israel. Today, the Lord (now acting from heaven) separates believers from the religious world.
4. Mark emphasized the Lord's *skilfulness* as He put His fingers into the deaf man's ears, in view of his healing. This was part of the healing process: the touch of the Master's hand! It seemed to make the situation even worse, but it illustrates how intensely the Lord identified with the man's problem. When we have a problem or are troubled in any way, let us go to Christ so that He may take charge. However, we first need to surrender to Him and allow Him to take full control.
5. Then He *spat*. We might think that this was somewhat inappropriate, but it was needed. This action expressed that Christ, from His inner being, shared *something of Himself* with this man.
6. Furthermore, He *touched* the deaf man's tongue. This demonstrates Christ's ability to bring about healing, the skilfulness of His hand.
7. He was "looking up to heaven." In Mark's Gospel, the Lord is portrayed as the dependent, humble Servant. His

resources came from God, and He publicly acknowledged that.

8. “He sighed.” This may have been reported to show how impressed our Lord was by the seriousness of the problem. We sigh¹ when we are faced with severe problems, but then we too, may look up to heaven for the resources that come from God.
9. “And He says, “Ephphatha” (the Aramaic word for “Be opened”). The ears need to be opened first, before other blessings can come. Romans 10:17 teaches that faith comes through hearing the Word of God (vv.8-21). An application: if you cannot hear yet, spiritually, it means that you are still lost. You need to listen first, for God to work further in your life.

The passage from Mark’s Gospel that we just examined is the first of eight references New Testament references using the particular verb, meaning, “to open up.” We may proceed to consider the seven occurrences of this verb found in Luke’s writings.

(2) The Opening of the Womb

In Luke 2, the opening is related to the Lord’s entering into this world and this forms quite a contrast to the situation of the deaf man who was unable to speak. Luke describes many details about Christ’s coming into this world and although this one is also linked with this word “opening,” the setting is quite different. “When the days were fulfilled for their purifying according to the Law of Moses, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord: Every male that *opens* the womb shall be called holy to the Lord)” (Lk. 2:22-23).

¹ The verb Mark used (Gr. *stenázō*) is also translated as *groan* (Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:2, 4; Heb. 13:17) or *grumble* (Jam. 5:9); it occurs 6 times in the NT.

Here we meet the Lord Jesus in His perfect humanity, as a Baby. He came into this world, being born like every other child, yet there was a tremendous difference because the Lord was conceived of the Spirit as announced by the angel Gabriel. Thus, from the very beginning, Christ is unlike all others, for He is God, blessed over all, yet (indescribable mystery) Son of God and Son of Man! We cannot fathom these mysteries of His Person, nor grasp the greatness of His stoop in becoming a Man through the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit in Mary. Such is “the mystery of piety” (cf. 1 Tim. 3:16): “The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us” (Jn. 1:14). The point that is highlighted here in Luke 2:23, is a quote from the Old Testament law, “Every male that *openeth* the womb shall be called holy to the Lord” (Ex. 13:2 KJV). At the time of Israel’s exodus from Egypt, God established His rights as Redeemer: righteous claims that He wanted to be demonstrated in every firstborn baby boy. Therefore, when the Lord Jesus came into this world, Joseph and Mary, through their obedient action, acknowledged God’s rights upon Christ as a man (perfect human being, in spirit, soul and body) and as One of God’s earthly people. Every human being should submit to God’s rights as *Creator* but our society does not and even we, as believers, do not always respect His claims. However, the principle of obedience and submission to God was maintained in the Baby Jesus. Every firstborn male child in Israel was to be set apart for God in recognition of His rights as *Creator-Redeemer*, and consecrated to Him and His service. Later in Exodus, this consecration was limited to the Levites but it remains a beautiful illustration for believers today. Furthermore, the Lord Jesus was not only born among His earthly people, but He also represented an entirely new generation, without sin, “sin apart.” The Lord did not have a human father as every one of us do, but He represents a new beginning as the Head of a new generation and Firstborn of a new order. Introducing this new order, He was set apart for God from the very start. Only on the basis of His death and resurrection, Christ has become

the First-born among many brethren and so believers are introduced into this new family.

APPLICATION TO BELIEVERS

From the moment we were born again, God set us apart for Himself. In that sense we are holy, sanctified. We do not have to wait a number of years to become holy or be declared holy by someone. No; Christians are holy by the calling with which they have been called. Thus, set apart, we are here for Him and for His interests. Do we apply this to our daily circumstances? As long as we are in this world: are we really devoted to God's interests? What a wonderful and perfect example we have in our Lord Jesus; what a challenge and encouragement can be found in Him!

(3) The Opening of the Eyes

Luke 1 and 2 provide details about the virgin Mary and about Him who came from her *womb*, whereas Luke 24 describes the virgin *tomb*. In this study, we consider the particular verb *dianoígō*, used to describe three things being opened in Luke 24. The tomb is opened first, though the verb is different (the stone rolled away), because the open and empty tomb is the basis for the following openings. In the apostles' public discourses recorded in Acts, we regularly find a reference to Christ's resurrection, the foundation on which we stand: as Christians we stand on resurrection ground (1 Cor. 15). Then we read the special verb that we are studying, "Their eyes were *opened*, and they recognised Him. And He disappeared from them" (Lk. 24:31). Looking at the context, we notice that these two disciples of Emmaus were discouraged and probably even depressed. But the Lord came to their rescue. How often we need the Lord to come in to encourage us! How did He do that with the two disciples? First, He asked about their circumstances. He did not impose Himself on them and, in God's providence, they did not immediately recognize Him either even though they had been familiar with Him. Then,

gradually, a change started to take place and they began to have confidence in Him, so that He could speak freely to them, "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory? And having begun from Moses and from all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (vv.26-27).

This is the third reference in the series of eight about a complete and thorough opening. The Lord could not have started with this teaching without the foundation He laid through His accomplished work and resurrection. But now, He was able to come closer to them, while speaking of Himself. How did He do so? By quoting Moses' writings, the Prophets and all the Scriptures (the complete Old Testament), He opened them up, explaining the things *concerning Himself!* The two disciples must have perked up their ears as they started to see ... and so their hearts opened up for Him. This could be a subject in itself: are our hearts really opened to welcome the Lord Jesus, to truly embrace Him, as Simeon did (Lk. 2:28)?

CHRIST IS THE KEY

It is important to understand that all the Scriptures speak of Christ. He is the Key. Without Him we cannot understand the writings of Moses. In the first chapter of Genesis we meet Him, the Creator: how great He is (cf. Jn. 1:1-2; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:2-3)! In Exodus, Moses describes many details linked to Israel's redemption from Egypt, but when we understand that the Lord Jesus is the Key, we start to see that He is being portrayed in the Passover lamb (Ex. 12), in the bondservant of Exodus 21, and in so many of these passages. Using Himself as the Key, according to God's thoughts, the Lord was able to gain the attention of the two disciples, drawing them away from their problems and themselves, *to the things concerning Himself*. As a result, the two disciples' eyes were opened (v.31). Thus, while the Scriptures were being presented *to* them, there was a work of God going on *in* them (cf. Gal. 1:16). If there is anything that we really need, it is this: that our attention and our hearts be

drawn to the Lord Jesus, to the things concerning Himself. This is how we should study the Scriptures. Then they become living, vibrant and real. When we take up the Scriptures in connection with our Lord Jesus Christ, our eyes, too, will be opened to see more of Him. Today there are orthodox Jews who know the Scriptures (the Old Testament) by heart. We may have a great respect for their knowledge but they still lack this opening of the eyes.

Saul of Tarsus was one of them but, once he had seen the Lord in glory, everything changed. He had learned the Scriptures by heart, but he did not know the One of whom they spoke! When he met Him, he understood the Key to the Old Testament record was right there (cf. Phil. 3:3-7; Heb. 2:9) and ... the Scriptures were unlocked to him. Although he knew them so thoroughly, outwardly, they had been like a closed book with a veil over them. However, Christ can and does take the veil away (2 Cor. 3 explains this in detail). That is, it may be suggested, what happened to the two disciples from Emmaus. When their eyes were opened “they knew Him” and recognized Him. At this point, a true relationship was established, because He stayed in their hearts, even though He vanished out of their sight. Is this true of us as well?

(4) The Scriptures Opened

The fourth occurrence of the verb *dianoígō* follows immediately and again, there is a direct link to the Scriptures. “And they said to one another, was not our heart burning in us as He spoke to us on the way, and as He opened the scriptures to us?” (v.32). We, too, in reading the Scriptures need the Lord’s help to understand more of Him, especially in portions that are difficult to grasp. If we do not comprehend them, let us not give up but keep on reading because the Holy Spirit will gradually open them up and make them clear. This may remind us of Psalm 119, “The entrance (opening) of Thy words gives light, giving understanding unto the simple” (Ps. 119:130). By the way, the two disciples had opened their house for the Lord Jesus

receiving Him into their home, having urged Him to come in (Lk. 24:29). This is another point to meditate on: by opening their house to Him, He came in as a Guest, but in due course He became the Host, the Master of the house, “Having taken the bread, He blessed, and having broken it, gave it to them” (v.30). Wonderful things happen when the Lord receives His rightful place in our homes. Does He really have this place in our homes and lives; is He “on the throne”?

(5) The Understanding Opened

There was a happy sequel to all of this, one that all the disciples enjoyed. “Then *opened* He their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures” (v.45). So our special word for opening is used for three matters in Luke 24:

- He opened their eyes, and they recognized Him;
- He opened the Scriptures; so they understood that the Scriptures speak of Him;
- He opened their understanding, so that they would be able to correctly apply the Scriptures in the way He had done this.

This is what we need as well. It is not sufficient to understand the Scriptures in a merely intellectual way. We need “a further touch” as we are in need of this opening of the understanding. We may connect this to that which John 6 describes about the matter of appropriation, because it is by eating that we make the things of God our own. This appropriating parallels the thought of opening the understanding in Luke 24. Through a process of eating and digesting we make the things concerning the Lord our own. There are two sides that go together again: we make the effort – we read the Scriptures, meditate on them, study and examine with the help of a concordance – while simultaneously a work of God takes place. Is it not striking to see how, at the same time that we take in His thoughts, God works together with us, helping us to make these things our own?

(6) The Heavens Opened

Luke's Gospel presents Christ as our Model on earth, but in Acts we find a company formed after the One who is now in heaven. In Acts 7, in Stephen, we meet the prototype of what a Christian is or should be: a witness-martyr. The Lord's testimony in this world is a suffering testimony, exemplified in Stephen, the overcomer. Just before he was stoned to death, he could say, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God" (v. 56). Here we find that same verb again, "opened," where it has the meaning of being thoroughly opened and being completely opened up. Comparing this with what is recorded in Matthew 3 about the Lord's baptism, we notice on that occasion that the heavens were opened upon the Lord, the Holy Spirit descending upon Him, to anoint Him in view of His coming public service. There on earth on the banks of the Jordan, He was the Object of heaven's delight, the heavens looking down on Him. But in Acts 7, it is the other way around: here there was a disciple on this earth while the heavens opened up for him, so that he could look up into Heaven, to see "the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." The Lord Jesus, again, is the Object, not on earth, but in heaven! What we find in Acts 7:56 is a wonderful summary of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which speaks about the opened heavens and the Son of man at God's right hand. In other words, before this Epistle was written, Stephen already enjoyed, in actual practice, the truth of Hebrews.

What about us? Do we appreciate the privileges that we have in an opened heaven with free access to come before the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16; 10:19)? We may, indeed, come freely and boldly with our requests, as well as with our praise and worship because we see "Jesus crowned with glory and honour" (2:9). In Acts 7, we read that the Lord was *standing*. This was possibly in order to sit down, because He had not long before entered heaven and had been welcomed by God (Heb. 5:10): the whole multitude of angels must have ascribed praise to Christ, entering

the heavens. But He was going to sit down, as the Epistles teach. On the other hand, Luke may have emphasized that Christ was standing there because He was, as it were, still waiting for His people to change their mind so that He would be able to go back to them (this will, in fact, happen after their future national confession, Isa. 53). At any rate, at this time He is the Son of man *sitting* at Gods' right hand! Yet Stephen, just before his death, saw Him *standing*: to receive His faithful servant and introduce him into Paradise at his martyrdom. And so Christ Himself was standing, *ready to come to Stephen's rescue*. Looking up to Jesus in heaven as Stephen did, is our privilege as well, for we may contemplate the glory of the Lord and be transformed from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18).

(7) The Opening of Lydia's Heart

"Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul" (Acts 16:14). This is a great example of a work of God. This Gentile merchant lady had shown interest in the God of Israel, having joined those faithful Jews who on the Sabbath used to come together at the riverside to pray.² That is where the Holy Spirit sent the apostle Paul and his company. While Paul was speaking, God opened Lydia's heart. Luke, who was present at the time, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, recorded what happened. According to the original language of the area Lydia came from, her name means something that is *grievous* or *painful*. This represents man's character and condition since Adam and Eve's fall; even the delivery of a baby is a painful matter. In Lydia we have an indication of what and where every human being really is, *sorrowful*. But Lydia had an interest in God; the KJV says, she "worshipped God"; this indicates her

² There was no synagogue at Philippi because there were not enough men. According to rabbinic rules, ten Jewish men were needed for a synagogue service. Since there were not enough Jewish men, the women would come together and sit down at the riverside for prayer, a custom familiar to Paul.

great interest, at that moment, in the Jewish religion and the God of Israel, an interest that prepared her for what was going to follow, when God would come into her life and “take control.” She had an interest in God, but now He comes in *to open her heart*. From the heart “are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). The heart is the very centre of our being, our personality and therefore, when the heart is opened to God, we are off to a good start. Later in the same chapter, she opened her house for the gospel, then for Paul and his company (Silas, Timothy, Luke), and probably for the believers in Philippi also, some of whom had been saved that same week. It is possible that the new assembly even started to meet there. An open house, indeed, but it started with a heart that was opened, even as it had been with the two disciples from Emmaus.

(8) Paul’s Ministry – Opening up the Scriptures

Leaving Lydia’s home, Paul travelled from Philippi to Thessalonica. There, for three Sabbaths, he spoke with the Jews in the synagogue. “**Opening** and setting before them that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ” (Acts 17:3). What was Paul doing here? He was doing the same as the Lord did in Luke 24 with the disciples from Emmaus. Using the Scriptures, *thoroughly opening them*, Paul, a Jewish Christian, presented the Old Testament scriptures to his fellow Jews (not Christians yet) and proving to them *Who* the Christ is according to the Scriptures – the Messiah – and explaining to them that He had to suffer (the same “must” we find in Luke 24:26). “This Jesus, whom I preach is the Christ.”³ Paul had been in the school of God and had learned to follow his Master’s example! With respect to Paul’s ministry, in Acts 26, Luke summarized the Lord’s instructions to Paul, using the same verb, “to open their eyes” (but without the prefix *dia*) as when Paul “opened up” the Scriptures. The Lord’s commission to Saul from the

³The verb “preach” or “proclaim” is identical to the one in Acts 17:18 and Philippians 1:18.

glory, was “to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me” (Acts 26:18). The Lord Jesus is once again, the supreme Object, as well as the Centre. Faith links us with Him *as He is now in the glory*. In connection with this, the opening of the eyes is mentioned one more time (Acts 17:3), using the verb *dianoígō*. What a change: from darkness to light! The extreme moral darkness described, especially in relation to Corinth and Ephesus (Acts 18-19), is the background against which our exalted Lord comes in, in grace. This intervention coincides with the action of our God and Father, who delivered us from the power of darkness and from the power of Satan, to transfer us into the kingdom of the Son of His love (Col. 1:13)!

More Things Opened

The eight occurrences of the verb *dianoígō* “(thorough) opening” or “to open up (completely)” introduce a new order of things. What is the result of all these openings – of the eyes, of the understanding and of the Scriptures? In the days after the Lord’s resurrection, these openings were necessary so that He could lead the disciples out to Bethany and bless them (Lk. 24:50-53). This *leading them out* was not only on the occasion of His ascension; it was also needed in view of a response they might give in worship to Christ and to God. After our Lord’s ascension, the disciples returned to Jerusalem to the temple, but they no longer belonged to the Jewish religious system that had cast out their Messiah.⁴ They were there continually rejoicing, praising and blessing God, as a priestly company for God’s interests linked with the glorified Christ.

⁴ Though morally speaking it took almost forty years to wean them from Judaism. (See also Hebrews, written to help the Jewish believers move out of the old system and “unto Christ”).

What a contrast with the beginning of Luke's Gospel, when Zacharias served inside the temple while the people stood outside! Then the entrance to God had been a closed one, even for the priest, while it was allowed that, only once a year, the high priest could enter God's presence and only with the blood of a sacrifice. Now the entrance was open, wide open, and the disciples had obtained free access. Today, this access is the privilege of every true Christian. All these "openings" demonstrate that we have free access to God the Father and to our glorified Lord, and this is through the Holy Spirit. The heavens are opened, and we can enter in by faith, our mouths opened to praise and bless God. Often our mouths are shut because of our failures (even though our position in Christ is perfect). Here in Luke 24 they were open because the disciples were welling forth a good message concerning the King (Ps. 45:1), their risen and ascended Lord. From the abundance of the heart, the disciples' mouths could speak in praise and worship. This "outflow" was in response to the openings worked by the Lord. May the Lord help us to be more at His feet, to learn from Him as He opens up the Scriptures, so that we can also be true worshippers! In heaven, our hearts will be opened to all the treasures of God's Word and we will be worshippers forever. What a prospect!

Alfred E. Bouter

Search the Scriptures!

1. What king had the first birthday party in the Bible?
2. Who wore the first bridal veil ?
3. Who was the second king of Israel?

MEAT

"Sanctify them by the truth"

"WHEN YE COME TOGETHER"

We desire to press upon our readers the necessity of deep heart-searching's before God as to the present general condition of things, and the lack of spiritual power and freshness in the gatherings together of the saints of God. Much depends in the way of testimony to those without, as well as edification to those within, upon the condition of the assemblies of the saints (I Cor. 14), and the glory of the Lord is ultimately lined up with it. Thence the importance of the subject.

When the soul is not honest and open before God it is easy to persuade oneself that things are not so bad after all, better, at least, in the limited circle in which we move than in any other. We exaggerate what seems right and minimize what is undoubtedly wrong, and compare ourselves with others to our own advantage, and in so doing we are like children playing at "let's pretend," and all the advantages of such folly go to our tireless and subtle enemy. Delusions of this sort are specially fatal, for they hinder us from going to God in true soul exercise and learning in His presence how we appear before Him, which is the only road of recovery.

It will do us no harm to hear what solemn things God had to say to His people of old. They might well come home to us today. He said, "This people draw near to Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor Me, but have removed their heart from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men" (Isa. 29:13). That indictment described THEIR

PRAYERS AND WORSHIP WHEN THEY PROFESSEDLY GATHERED TO HIM. Do they describe ours and do our consciences stir uneasily as we read the words? Notice what went along with this condition, that which went along with this condition, that which probably was the chief cause of it - the precept of men had taken the place of the Word of God and His fear. The Word had been ousted from its authoritative place, and precept and tradition had become the rule of conduct, and they walked in the fear of what men thought and taught instead of the fear of God. Consequently the Word was a sealed book to them; seers, prophets, and rulers could not understand it and the unlearned could not read it. The whole state is laid bare in this solemn passage.

But is not this increasingly the condition of things today? How often does some teaching, tradition, or manmade rule bind the conscience instead of the Word! How often is the plain Word - the commandments of God - neutralized, made of none effect by the precepts of men! Could any condition be more deplorable than this? For does it not prove that man is more to us than God, that God Himself has been displaced in the heart? It surely does, for "IF AMAN LOVE ME HE WILL KEEP MY WORDS."

God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth, and if men's words have taken the place of His, this cannot be done, and to profess to draw near to Him in prayer or worship when the heart is removed from Him can only move His displeasure, for it is mere pretence. And where such a condition of things has set in recovery is needed, and recovery can only be reached by the way of repentance.

There is another solemn description of these people not less searching: "*The children of they people...speak to one another, everyone to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and THEY HEAR THY WORDS, BUT THEY WILL NOT DO THEM; for with their mouths they show much*

love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for THEY HEAR THY WORDS BUT THEY DO THEM NOT" (Ezek. 33:30-32)

Here is described their gatherings for the PREACHING AND TEACHING OF THE WORD.

These people came to be interested and pleased by the preaching, to approve or to criticize as the word accorded or otherwise with their particular view of things, but they had not intention of being subject to the Word they heard. They did not gather with Samuel's cry in their hearts, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." Nor did they inquire with Saul of Tarsus, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Their minds were already made up to go their own way, and to please themselves.

Happy are we if this state of things does not describe the meetings with which we are familiar, but eh test as to this surely is, "How much does all the preaching and teaching of the Word to which we have listened affect our practical living? do we go forth from hearing the Word to do it? Or are we like these hypocritical of old who with their mouths showed love, but whose hearts went after their covetousness?" solemn questions these, and yet is only by searching and probing that the true condition of things is revealed.

There is a further passage which brings out the awful subtlety of the human heart, and proves the necessity of living before God if we are to be preserved from being deceived by it. It tells us when Israel was in trouble under God's chastening hand, "*They sought Him and enquired early after God... Nevertheless they did flatter Him with their mouth, AND THEY LIED UNTO HIM WITH THEIR TONGUES. For their heart was not right with Him, neither were they steadfast in His covenant" (Ps. 78:13-37).*

"They lied unto Him with their tongues." With these ancient people there was merely the wish to escape trouble, they did not intend to hear the rod, or learn the lesson that God's

chastening love would teach them. They professed sorrow and piety, but it was hypocrisy. From such an awful condition may the good Lord deliver us. But we need to search our hearts. God is not less holy than every he was, though the fullness of His grace has now revealed itself. For lying unto God Ananias and his wife were stricken with instant death. "Our God is a consuming fire."

It will be noticed that in each of these scriptures quoted the heart has a prominent place.

1. They removed their heart from Me.
2. Their heart goeth after their covetousness.
3. For their heart was not right with Him.

Everything depends upon the heart for out of it are the issues of life. When the people of God become sick with this heart malady He alone can recover them, but how comforting it is to know that He is always ready to do this. The heart is reached through the conscience, and that again is reached by the Word, but the Word is ineffective unless there is revived in the soul the fear of God. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, it is the gate of every true blessing. Under its influence His Word assumes its proper sway in the conscience, enlightens the understanding, and revives the languishing faith, so that "GOD IS" becomes the prime fact in our lives. Men sink into their true insignificance, the thoughts and intents of our hearts are laid bare, judged, and repented of, and we and our brethren are all measured according to His presence.

J.T. Mawson

Answers to Scripture search!

1. Pharaoh (Genesis 40:20)
2. Rebekah (Genesis 24:65)

3. Ishbosheth (2 Samuel 2:8-10)

EXERCISE

"Exercise thyself unto piety"

HOW MAY WE LOVE HIM MORE?

If we love a person, we are jealous about his name and honor. We do not like to hear him spoken against without speaking up for him and defending him. We feel bound to maintain his interests and his reputation. We regard the person who treats him ill with almost as much disfavor as if he had ill-treated us. Well, it is just so between the true Christian and Christ. The true Christian regards with a godly jealousy all efforts to disparage his Master's word, or name, or church, or day. He will confess Him before princes, if need be, and be sensitive of the least dishonor put upon Him. He will not hold his peace and suffer his Master's cause to be put to shame without testifying against it. And why is all this? Simply because he loves Him.

If we love a person, we like to talk to him. We tell him all our thoughts, and pour out all our hearts to him. We find no difficulty in discovering subjects of conversation. However silent and reserved we may be to others, we find it easy to talk to a much-loved friend. However often we may meet, we are never at a loss for matter to talk about. We have always much to say, much to ask about, much to describe, much to communicate. Well, it is just so between the true Christian and Christ! The true Christian finds no difficulty in speaking to his Savior. Every day he has something to tell Him, and he is not happy unless he tells it. He speaks to Him in prayer every morning and night. He tells Him his wants and desires, his

feeling and his fears. He asks counsel of Him in difficulty. He asks comfort of Him in trouble. He cannot help it. He must converse with his Savior continually, or he would faint by the way. And why is this? Simply because he loves Him.

Finally, if we love a person, we like to be always with him. Thinking, and hearing, and readying and occasionally talking are all well in their way. But when we really love people we want something more. We long to be always in their company. We wish to be continually in their society and to hold communion with them without interruption or farewell. Well, it is just so between the true Christian and Christ. The heart of a true Christian longs for that blessed day when he will see his Master face to face, and go out no more. He longs to have done with sinning and repenting, and believing and to begin that endless life when he shall see as he has been seen, and sin no more! He has found it sweet to live by faith, and he feels it will be sweeter still to live by sight. He has found it pleasant to hear of Christ, and talk of Christ, and read of Christ. How much more pleasant will it be to see Christ with his own eyes and never to leave Him any more. Any why is all this? Simply because he loves Him.

Those who love Christ should never be ashamed to let others see it and know it. Speak for Him. Witness for Him. Live for Him. Work for Him. If He has loved you and washed you from your sins in His own blood, you never need shrink from letting others know that you feel it, and love Him in return.

May we never think that we can love Christ too well, live to Him too thoroughly, confess Him too boldly, lay ourselves out for Him too heartily! Of all the things that will surprise us in the resurrection morning, this, I believe, will surprise us most: that we did not love more.

J.C. Ryle

Two lovers built two cities. The love of God built Jerusalem and the love of the world built Babylon. Let every man enquire of himself what he loves and he shall resolve himself of whence he is a citizen!- St. *Augustine* (354-430 A.D.).

REST

"Shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?"

"THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT"

2 Corinthians 1:3.

How blessed, then, to know that the God of our salvation, the One who has been fully set forth in Christ, is "the God of *all* comfort." The phrase is preceded by another - "the Father of mercies"; that is, as we understand it, the mercies or compassions which have been ministered to us through our Lord Jesus Christ have all flowed out to us through Him from the Father's heart. (Compare Rom. 12:1; 1 John 3:1.) In like manner, God is the blessed fount and source of all the comfort which can be received, and He is this because He is the God of resurrection. Now that . He has been fully glorified in the death of His beloved Son, He is set free in righteousness to let the mighty tide of His comforts flow out, without let or hindrance on His side, into the sorrowing hearts of His people in every part of the world. The only barrier to its inflow, at any time of need and distress, is to be found in our own state. A clear way has been made for Himself to minister it; but, alas! its reception is often checked by our unbelief and lack of expectation.

Together with this it must be remembered that, if He is "the God of *all* comfort," there is no comfort outside of Himself. It is one of the sorrowful failings of His people that they do so often turn to other sources for relief and alleviation in seasons of grief; and thereby they miss the blessed lessons which He would teach them through their exercises under His chastening. Like Israel of old, instead of turning at once, when under pressure, to Himself, they frequently have recourse to the broken cisterns which can hold no water. Not living

amid unseen things, they want human sympathies and support, and seek thus to comfort themselves, only, however, to realize, sooner or later, that the very thing which they most craved for and obtained for themselves was but another means of sorrow. No! God is "the God of *all* comfort," and His mourners are shut up to Him, for He alone can put off their sackcloth and gird them with gladness, and cause them to sing praise to Him and not be silent. Taking up this attitude of waiting alone upon Him, they will soon learn that, if weeping endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning. Let these two things, therefore, be engraven upon our hearts, that He Himself is the source of all our comfort, and that there is no comfort elsewhere to be found.

It should be remarked, also, that to comfort is His character - that, in other words, He is the comforting God. As the apostle says, "Who comforteth us in all our tribulation," and again in chapter 7, "Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down." So likewise in the Psalms, as, for example, "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." In each of these passages it will be noticed that the verb is in the present tense, that the action is consequently characteristic, and that therefore it is not what God will sometimes do if we wait upon Him, but what He ever does because it is His character and delight to do it. The question need therefore never be raised, Is He willing to comfort? It should rather be this, Are we in the state to receive this blessed ministry from Himself? What a God it is with whom we have to do! One who has told out all His heart in the dark domain of death through the gift of His beloved Son; One who, being "rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us . . . hath quickened us together with Christ"; and the One who, while we are passing through a world where sorrow and tribulation are our portion, presents Himself to us as a comforting God - the God, as Paul says, "who comforteth us in all our tribulation." And is He not the same still? He is not One who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, and we may therefore come boldly to the throne of grace for the needed mercy and the seasonable help. What an

evangel of consolation this is to weary, burdened, and sorrowing hearts!

"continued from back cover"

A mere return to morality and outward change will not solve this world's problems—nor is it even possible while the underlying cause of sin remains untreated. There must be, on man's part, repentance of his sin to God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Until that point is reached, there can be no remedy for the devastating ills of the world. God has commanded all men everywhere to repent, and He has appointed the day when He will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus—a fact that He gave assurance of when He raised Him from the dead (Acts 17:30–31). The crux of the whole matter is man's treatment of the Son of God. No matter how lofty the moral standards or how spiritual the principles adopted, until men have made the Son of God their Savior, they are lost!

Dear reader, what about you? Are you concerned about what ails the world? Do you search for an answer to its symptoms? If you're concerned, that's good! But what about your own soul? No matter what level of morality you pursue or what level of spirituality you have obtained, if you haven't repented of your sins to God and trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, you have not addressed the great need of your soul! Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6). We urge you to get right with God through Jesus Christ: He died on the Cross at Calvary to put away your sins by the sacrifice of Himself. There He shed His precious blood by which your redemption can be accomplished (1 Peter 1:18–19). Our eternal destiny depends on whether or not we put our trust in Him as our personal Savior.

May God grant that each of us concerned by the events of the day may search our hearts in the presence of God and be led to repentance and faith in that Blessed One whom God gave. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE WORLD?

Charles R. Brown, head of the Department of History at Roanoke College, answered the question this way:

“Practically everyone admits that the world is sick, but just what ails it continues to baffle all the doctors. In fact, no one up to the moment has offered any genuinely intelligent diagnosis, yet there are thousands of remedies being urged and tried. Of course, many people have attempted to tell us what ails the world, but their suggestions are usually prejudiced by their own personal interests and for that reason fail even to approach a good diagnosis.

“Man alone of all creation is considered capable of devising and improving standards of living. Every generation since the advent of man has been charged with the responsibility of maintaining a high standard of morals and history testifies strongly that whenever man has neglected his morals, his civilization has suffered accordingly. Loose morals have undoubtedly contributed much to the downfall of all civilizations previous to ours and loose moral living if not corrected will most certainly wreck our world.

“What is wrong with the world? It is morally and spiritually sick and no one seems to have the courage to administer the cure. Therefore, the challenge to all people must be to get ready to stand on their own feet in simple, rugged, and honest living, if our civilization is to survive.”

These are eloquent words and in many respects they speak truth while in others they manifest a sad lack of a real understanding of the issues that confront the world today. The world is “morally and spiritually sick.” The symptoms of violence, drug addiction, greed, lawlessness, lack of morality, abortion, and others all prove we are in the last days of grace—days like those of Noah when violence and corruption filled the earth and brought forth the judgment of God. Sin is the root cause of all these dreadful symptoms that plague the world today, and there is only one remedy for that root cause. It is found in the once crucified, now risen and glorified Son of God, Jesus Christ.

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