



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,

“What is that in thy hand?” Exodus 4: 2

What gift, ability, power, or influence has God given you? See whether it can be used for Him. You might say, “I am young,” but the Word of God says, “Let no one despise thy youth.” You might say, “But what I have is very insignificant,” but remember a shepherd staff and what it became in Moses’ hand. Mary had a spikenard box in her hand yet the fragrance of that sweet perfume has floated down through all the ages. The poor widow had two mites in her hand — a small thing for the treasury, but what did the Lord Jesus say about its true value in His sight? How about the lad with the five loaves and the two fishes in his hand? How many were fed when he gave them to the Lord?

So the question to us is not what would you like or hope to have in your hand, but what is in your hand? Whatever you have, use it for God and see what God will make of it! As we enter into the New Year, here is a challenge for you, dear friend: what would you do if you had only one more year to live?

Dear Friends,

Our hearts are full of thanksgiving to the Lord who is the Faithful and True. He is our help in years past and our hope for that which to come. To you, dear reader, who is praying for Toward the Mark and to those who are helping in producing this exercise, they are known by the Lord and He is the reward of their quiet labor of love.

It is our prayer that you will find this issue good reading material and help for you as you face the daily challenges of school or work, as we are dependent on Him to feed and strengthen His people.

Thank you for your overwhelming response and encouragement to this exercise. Please keep us in prayers.

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 J. N. Darby translation.

MILK

"The truth shall make you free"

SIN AND SINS

Although there is a close connection between *sin* and *sins*, they are different things. Both are mentioned in Rom. 5:12, "By one man *sin* entered into the world and death by *sin*; and so death passed upon all men for that all have *sinned*."

Sin entered the world at the fall of Adam. Just as a snake's poison will run through the whole body from only one bite and do its deadly work, *sin* - the poison of that serpent, the devil - has permeated and ruined man's moral nature. As a result, *all* have sinned. Thus *sins* of omission or commission in thought, word or act, are chargeable to each of us. *Sin*, then, is the root principle or nature, whereas *sins* are the evil fruits from that evil tree.

We find out what *sin* is in 1 Jn. 3:4, "Whosoever commits sin practices lawlessness for sin is lawlessness" (Revised Version) The King James Version (KJV) incorrectly uses the term "transgression of the law" for "lawlessness," but there is a big difference between the two. There can be no transgression of a law unless there is a clear-cut law to disobey and there was no written law from Adam to Moses. Hence, there was no transgression and sin wasn't imputed. Yet sin was there as well as death, sin's penalty (Rom. 5:13-14). On the other hand, *lawlessness* is simply the refusal of all rule, the throwing off of divine restraint, the defiance of God's will. Thus Adam began on a course of sin when he ate the forbidden fruit.

Instead of being a master, man is now mastered by the evil thing to which he has yielded himself. Sin has dominion over him and constantly causes *sins* to be committed. Sin exerts such a deadening influence on the conscience that sinners are completely unconscious of their terribly dangerous position apart from the grace of God.

When God's grace does act and the Holy Spirit works in life-giving power in a soul, the first cry of that soul is of need and pain. His past *sins* burden his conscience and the burden does not end until the value

of the precious blood of Christ is known and the person can say, "My sins are forgiven!"

Then, usually at some later time, the question of *sin* is raised with the new believer. We discover that although our sins are forgiven, the root principle (sin) from which the sins come is still in us. What is to be done with sin?

It's important to realize that *sin* is the root of our problems. We often get so occupied with the fruit (sins) that we forget to consider the root. A young man complained to an older Christian that, in spite of all his prayers and efforts, he was still constantly sinning. "On what trees do apples grow?" was the only answer he got. "Why, on an apple tree," said the astonished youth. The question seemed so irrelevant. "And on what trees do plums grow," was the next question. The youth answered, "On a plum tree." The older believer then asked, "On what tree do sins grow?" The youth smiled and answered, "On a sin tree." He then understood that the sins we Christians commit are not little isolated bits of evil inserted somehow into our lives by Satan. These sins come out as fruit of *sin* which is *within* us. "If we say that we have no sin. We deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 Jn. 1:8).

The only remedy for sin is *death!* Death (or the resurrection-change, 1 Cor. 15:51-53, if Jesus comes before we die) will end sin for us. The last trace will then be gone. We happily anticipate that time!

Do we as joyfully look *back* to the time when the death of Jesus, the great Remedy, came in? Rom. 6:10 says, "In that He died, He died unto sins once but in that He lives, He lives unto God." He died *for* our sins, atoning for them but He also died *to* sin. Therefore, as taught by the Holy Spirit, we recognize by faith that we are identified with our great Representative: His death is ours. We, too, then, are "dead to sin" and we can no longer constantly live in sin (Rom. 6:2). Thus, we reckon (consider, count) ourselves "to be dead indeed unto sin but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:11).

Notice that the sin to which Jesus died was purely an external thing to Himself. "In Him is no sin" (1 Jn. 3:5). Our sin is both external and internal. Also, the death of Christ was not only our death to sin, but it was the total condemnation of the sin to which we died. Rom. 8:3

says, "God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and (by a sacrifice) for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." At the cross, sin in its full hideousness, was revealed because lawlessness reached its maximum there, and in that holy sacrifice its judgment was borne and its condemnation expressed.

Thus *sins* have been borne and their judgment exhausted. *Sin* has been exposed and condemned and we have died to it in the death of Christ. The cross was all this and more!

In Jn. 1:29 and Rom. 8:3, we read of "the sin of the world" and of "sin in the flesh," The first expression is very comprehensive, sin (the root) and every offshoot of sin in the world is to be taken away by the Lamb of God. He will do it as seen in Rev. 19-21 on the basis of the cross. The second expression, "sin in the flesh," is something different. Sin (the root) is always the same, but the "flesh" - the old, fallen nature of the children of Adam - is the great vehicle in which it lives and works to produce sins in all individuals.

Imagine a great electrical power network in a city with all the wires without insulation. Fear, shock and death would be everywhere. *Sin* is like the subtle electric current making its influence felt in every direction. The *flesh* is like the generator plus the wires - the *seat* of the electricity plus the *means* through which it acts. *Sins* are like the individual shocks which result in *death*. The *sin of the world* is like the whole power network. But the cross will destroy the whole thing.

We do not find "forgiveness of *sin*" (the root) in the Bible. We *do* find forgiveness of sins and of a sin. Let's illustrate this. A mother has a son who is rapidly developing a terrible temper. One day, he tries to force his sister to look at something outside the house when she is more interested in playing with her dolls. In the struggle, he brings her head with a crash against the window and her head is cut by the broken glass. His mother sends him to his room and when Dad returns, the son is very properly punished. By evening, the punishment has had its desired effect. He comes in tears to his parents and confesses his wrong. They forgive the angry act but do they forgive the evil temper from which it sprang? No! If they did, it would be to condone it. Rather, they strongly condemn it and lovingly

but firmly show the son its evil nature and consequences, and they seek to lead him to hate and condemn it as much as they do.

“God ... condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3). *He did not condone or forgive it.* Now, the work of the Holy Spirit in us leads us to condemn it just as God has condemned it, so that we may know deliverance from its power.

This does not mean that believers won't sin. Condemnation is not elimination. Sin is still in us (1 Jn. 1:8). The Bible supposes that the believer may sin, because it gives the divine provision for such a case (1 Jn. 2:1). It even tells us that we all do sin (Jas. 3:2).

God has left sin and the flesh (old nature) in believers so that they can learn their true nature, can experimentally come into line with God's condemnation of them at the cross, and can find life and deliverance in another. He then can personally thank God, through Jesus Christ, that he is delivered (Rom. 7:24-25).

1 Jn. 3:9 is often thought to conflict with the above because it says in the KJV, "whosoever is born of God does not commit sin." This verse states the *nature* of one born of God. He does not *practice* sin - the correct translation of *commit*. It is not his nature to practice sin. The apostle John here views believers in their nature as born of God without reference to any abnormal, qualifying features that may occur in the wear-and-tear of life.

What is the effect on a Christian when he sins? It has nothing to do with his safety, because the cross of Christ is the ground of our safety. There, *sin* was condemned and atonement made so that we are eternally forgiven when we believe. This forgiveness is the *gift* of divine grace and "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29) - they are not subject to a change-of-mind on God's part. However, sins after salvation do reduce the Christian's happiness and remove the *joy* of both our forgiveness and our relationship with God until in self-judgment such sins are confessed. Then, through the advocacy of Christ, we get the Father's forgiveness (1 Jn. 1:9-2:1). We all have to learn painful but profitable lessons in this way and thus discover the true nature of the flesh within us, and that the only way to keep from gratifying its desires is to "walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16).

In closing, let's look a little more at what the Lord Jesus did on the cross in relation to sin. Did He bear the sins of everybody? The Bible says that "He died for all" (2 Cor. 5:15), that He "gave Himself a ransom for all" (1Tim. 2:6), and that "He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but also for (the sins of) the whole world" (1 Jn. 2:2). These verses show the *Godward* aspect of His work. *All* are included in its *intention*. *Propitiation* (God being satisfied) has been made on *behalf* of everyone in the whole world.

When we come to the actual results of His work instead of its intention, things are put differently. We can not say that He *bore* the sins of everybody because Scripture says, "Who His own self bore *our* (believer's) sins" (1 Pet. 2:24) and that "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many" (Heb. 9:28). Thank God that we are part of the many!

F. B. Hole

Meat

“Sanctify them by the truth...”

LORDSHIP

In Christianity today, we are generally willing to accept all of the privileges and blessings of salvation, yet at the same time reluctant to maintain our responsibilities as servants of our Lord Jesus. In short, we know and love Jesus as our Saviour, but not as our Lord. It is the purpose of this short note to set out some of our responsibilities so that we may more effectively represent our Lord Jesus here in this world.

Lordship, or our acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord, is the foundation of our salvation. Peter at the first preaching of the gospel in Acts 2, presents Jesus: crucified, raised, and glorified — now made Lord and Christ by God — and salvation is in this One. In Acts 16, Paul reaffirms that salvation is by belief: “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” This salvation brings us, by the calling of God, “into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:9). The fact is, we must know Jesus as Lord to realize our salvation. He alone is **able, willing**, and has the **power** to save.

The characteristics of His Lordship may be summarized as follows:

1. Supremacy
2. Authority
3. Administration

In the first, He is Lord of All; the second deals with the commandments of the Lord; and in the third, we see His provision as the Administrator of all blessing “through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

To appreciate more clearly this Lordship, there are examples for us in 1 Cor. 10 and 11:

1. The Lord’s Cup
2. The Lord’s Table
3. The Lord’s Earth (The earth is the Lord’s)
4. The Lord’s Supper
5. The Lord’s Death
6. The Lord’s Body

Prior to entering into these examples, the Apostle brings before our attention the truth of our associations and the responsibilities which are ours. Using the children of Israel as an example, he describes the place of blessing which is shared by all: “all...under the cloud...passed through the sea...baptized onto Moses...did eat the same spiritual meat, and...drink the same spiritual drink” (1 Cor. 10:1-4). But sadly, with “many” God was not pleased. They failed through lusting, idolatry, fornication, tempting Christ, and murmuring (1 Cor. 10: 6-10). All of these have spiritual application for us. Lust – a wrong desire for something in place of God’s provision; idolatry – placing that thing we lust after in the place God should have in our lives. Fornication here has to do with wrong affections: allowing our natural desires to overrule in our spiritual lives, giving friends and family place before the Lord. Tempting Christ involves being dissatisfied with divine provision – “loathing this light bread.” Finally, in murmuring we reject the Lord Himself – “give us a captain” – give up our position and return to Egypt. There is a real regression from God’s desire for His people. Note, this is not the historical order of these events, but rather the moral order as given by the Spirit of God for our learning.

As those who have been saved and blessed, we are now to accept Christ’s Lordship in our lives - thus practically bringing us into His “fellowship” (1 Cor.1:9) - and to live subject to Him. The responsibility of those “in the fellowship” is seen as we read 1 Cor. 10:14-33. Please read these verses and see how this will affect us in our daily life. We have “blessed the cup of blessing.” We recognize the blood of our Lord Jesus shed as the basis of the communion or fellowship (partnership). The bread, which we break, is another symbol of our fellowship: one loaf of which we all partake. Note well that in chapter 10 we do not drink from the cup, nor do we eat the bread. All Israel were identified with the altar because they ate of the sacrifices, the peace offerings. So we, who are identified with the Lord Jesus as those in the partnership (fellowship), must conduct ourselves in accordance with the Lord’s standards.

Let us return to our first example, the Lord’s cup. I would suggest that this is “the cup” referred to in Mat. 20:17-23: namely, a cup of rejection by this world. We who represent the Lord are identified with Him – in partnership – and the “drinking of my cup.” There is no

thought here of the cup our Lord referred to in Gethsemane (He and He alone could undertake that work of redemption) but our lives would take on the same cup of rejection and self sacrifice. “Ye shall drink of my cup.” Mat. 20:23 – His authority.

Next, The Lord’s Table (or the Lordly Table), brings before us all of the blessings He administers. This is where every believer walking rightly enjoys divine provision and communion. Just as at a natural table we enjoy the food, drink, and conversation provided by the host, so at the Lord’s Table, divine food and drink - every blessing enjoyed from the Lord’s hand and in converse with Him - is available to us at all times. As the beloved psalmist says, “Thou preparest a table before me, in the presence of mine enemies” (Ps. 23:5). (Note that the Lord’s Table is an essential prerequisite for the Lord’s Supper, which follows in chapter 11.)

The Lord’s earth comes third. Here His supremacy is maintained and His rights emphasized. Whatever I do is to be done to God’s glory and to please others, not seeking my own profit, but that of the many.

Therefore, in chapter 10 we find our responsibilities are prominent as those brought into His fellowship and in chapter 11 our privilege as partakers of the Lord’s Supper. While one has well said that this is the greatest privilege this side of eternity, yet it is **the Lord’s Supper**. His rights, administration, and supremacy are maintained. There is no place for our wishes or ideas, but only His desires and instruction. This action is the response to His heart of love from His lovers. It is here, at this occasion, that we bring **Him** to mind - who He is, the greatness and glories of the Person who has effected all for the glory of God, who has secured a company of divine worshippers, has brought many sons to glory and redeemed to God a vast company from every kindred, tongue, people and nation. It is not so much our blessing, although clearly He has accomplished that, but so much more. What He has obtained for God, how He has glorified God, as Man, in all subjection in fulfilling the will of God. Who can plumb the heights and depths of Him, the Son of God, Son of Man, and Son of David? What can we bring to Him on this occasion? What response to His loving invitation – “**This** do...in remembrance of me?” Not, **do** this. What gracious privilege is ours under His

administration and subject to Him. Surely our hearts will be led out by Him to bless The Father.

We come now to the Lord’s death. What does our partaking of the Lord’s Supper denote to the world around us? We show His dying, for that is the meaning of this term. It is akin to the word in Rev. 5. the Lamb *freshly slain* – so the force here is to demonstrate to the world the dying of the Lord. In this act we identify with His dying and show that our lives are therefore as dead indeed to this world and alive to God. Dead with Christ to the rudiments of this world. (Col. 2:20). In a word, subjection to Him.

The Lord’s body is our final example in this chapter of His Lordship. The awful result of partaking of His supper in an unworthy manner (i.e., not recognizing His supreme place in this action) is to fail to discern the Lord’s body. The body of the Lord was prepared for Him to take up here in this world, to manifest the Father and show forth all His wonderful love and grace, and was given up at the Cross of Calvary as the Supreme Sacrifice and Offering to a Holy and Righteous God. That body is worthy of all reverence and awe on the part of His own. It is the Lord’s Body which is represented by the bread we eat in the Lord’s Supper; let us not enter lightly upon such an act.

Perhaps these few thoughts may draw out our affections to Himself and bring us into that place of communion and subjection where His rights and authority become the object of our lives.

J.A.Pickering

Exercise

"Exercise thyself unto piety"

MAKE THE PLUNGE

Be of good cheer if your hearts are set on Christ: there is your stay, the anchor of your soul. If He is such, dear friends, stand forward for Him; be not ashamed to own your relationship to Him, your dependence on Him: be decided, cut short all expedients for deferring the bold acknowledgement of your being His; confess Him before men, and act for Him, and live for Him in an ungodly world. He is not ashamed to call you brethren; and will you be ashamed to confess Him as your Lord and Master in the face of all the world?

Be not debating within yourselves, when you shall avow yourselves; do it at once, decidedly. **Make the plunge, and trust God for the consequence.** I know it by experience that an open bold confession of being Christ's is more than half the struggle over. I know the devil tempts, and says, "O, do not be too hasty; you might ruin the cause by over-forwardness; this is not the time to confess yourself openly, wait for another opportunity." But I say, dear friends, as one who knows, that if a man, in the strength of the Lord, is just brought to say to his companions and friends, "I am Christ's, and I must act for Him," that he will not suffer what others will feel who are creeping on fearful and afraid to avow Him whom they desire to serve. Believe me, my friends, it is as I say: by this decided and open opposition to the world he may at first be laughed at and mocked; but what of that? Christ was served so. But soon, when his companions find him resolute, they will give him up as a bad case which they can make no hand of, and they will leave him comparatively free from ridicule.

Are there any of you who are thus halting between two opinions, and afraid to confess your obligations to the Lord? Oh! I once more entreat you to be candid. Be open, be decided, confess Christ's name on earth, and He will not be ashamed to confess your name before the whole assembled universe.

J. N. Darby

REST

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

"THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD"

He knows His sheep;

He counts them and He calleth them by name.

He goes before;

They follow as He leads, through flood or flame.

The Twenty-third Psalm unfolds before us the blessings of one who takes his journey, through this world, with the Lord Jesus as his Shepherd.

The Psalm is closely connected with the preceding Psalm, as well as the one that follows. All three Psalms are of outstanding beauty and value, seeing that in each one Christ is the great theme. Ps. 22 presents the Lord Jesus as the Holy Victim offering Himself without spot to God, on the cross, in order to meet the holiness of God and secure His sheep. Ps. 23 presents the Lord Jesus as the Shepherd leading His sheep through the wilderness world. Ps. 24 presents the Lord Jesus as the King - the Lord of hosts - bringing His people into the kingdom of glory.

The Psalm opens with the great statement, "The LORD is my Shepherd." Every believer can say, "The Lord is my Savior"; but have we all definitely submitted to His leading, so that we can each say, "The LORD is my Shepherd?" He has told us that He is "the Shepherd"; but have we each told Him, Thou are "my Shepherd?" Have we not only accepted Him as our Savior who has died for us to save us from our sins, but also submitted Him as our Shepherd to lead us home through all our difficulties?

Let us think for a moment of a flock of sheep **without a shepherd.** They are needy, foolish, weak, and timid creatures. If left to themselves to take their way through a wilderness scene, what would happen? Being hungry creatures they would soon starve; being foolish, they would wander and lose their way; being weak, they

would grow weary and fall by the way; and being timid, they would flee before the wolf and be scattered.

In contrast, let us ask what will happen if the sheep take their journey under **the guidance of the shepherd?** Now, if the sheep are hungry, the shepherd is there to guide them into green pastures; if they are foolish, he is there to keep their wandering feet; are they weak, the shepherd is present to gently lead his sheep and carry the lambs; are they timid, he is in front to lead them through the rough valleys, and defend them from every foe.

Plainly, in a flock without the shepherd everything depends upon the sheep, and this must lead to disaster. It is equally plain, that if the shepherd goes before, and the sheep follow, it will mean a safe journey for the sheep with manifold blessing by the way.

This, indeed, is the picture that truly represents the journey of the Christian flock, through this world; for does not the Lord, Himself, say that He is “the Shepherd of the sheep,” that “He calleth His own sheep by name,” that “He goeth before them, and the sheep follow; for they know His voice” (Jn. 10:2-4).

The Twenty-third Psalm sets before us this blessedness of the Shepherd going before, and the sheep following. We, alas! in our self-confidence, may at times get in front of the Shepherd; or growing careless, we may lag far behind. But granted the two conditions - that the Shepherd leads the way, and we follow - we can count upon the support of the Shepherd in every difficulty that we have to meet.

The Psalmist touches upon seven different circumstances that we may be called to face:

1. Our daily needs
2. Our spiritual needs
3. Our failure and dullness of soul
4. The shadow of death
5. The presence of enemies
6. The daily round
7. The prospect of eternity

All these things may, in varied ways and at different times, cross our paths, and, if left to face them in our own strength, will surely overwhelm us with dread and disaster. Nevertheless, with the Lord as

our Shepherd, to lead the way, we can with confidence face the journey that leads to glory, in spite of the difficulties that may lie in the path.

As every blessing in the Psalm flows from the first great statement, “The LORD is my Shepherd,” we may very well preface each verse with these words, “The LORD is my Shepherd.”

First (v. 1), there are **the daily needs of the body**. How are they to be met? The Psalmist does not say, “I hold a good office, I shall not want”; or, “I have kind friends who will care for me, I shall not want”; or “I have ample means, I shall not want”; or “I have youth, and health, and abilities, I shall not want.”

In all these ways, and many others, the LORD may meet our wants, but of none of these means does the Psalmist speak. He looks beyond all second causes, and providential ways, and he sees the LORD; and with the LORD going before, and he himself following, he can say, “The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want.”

Secondly (v. 2), in the wilderness path there are not only temporal wants, but **spiritual needs**. For the Christian the world around is an empty wilderness. There is nothing in all its passing vanities to feed the soul. Its pastures are dry and barren; its waters, only waters of strife. If “the LORD is my Shepherd,” He will lead me into His green pastures and beside the still waters.

How quickly the pleasures of this world pall, even upon its votaries. The spiritual food provided by the Shepherd is ever fresh, for He leads into the “**green** pastures.” Moreover, the Shepherd not only feeds, but satisfies, for He makes His sheep to “**lie down** in green pastures.” No hungry sheep would lie down in the midst of plenty. It would first feed, and when full lie down. Furthermore, the Shepherd leads beside the still waters. The waters of the stream that makes most noise, and show, are ever where the rocks are most abundant and the waters shallow. The still waters are quiet but deep. The Shepherd can calm our souls, and quench our spiritual thirst with the deep things of God far removed from the noisy and shallow strivings that occupy men, and too often distract the Christian.

Thirdly (v. 3), as we pass through this wilderness world we may **fail** in following the Shepherd; and, apart from actual failure, we may

grow weary in the way and dull in our affections. Even so, if “the LORD is my Shepherd” “He restoreth,” or “reviveth,” my soul. Let us, however, remember it is “He,” Himself, that “restoreth.” It almost seems, at times, as if we think that when we have grown weary of our wanderings, we can restore ourselves by our efforts and in our own time. It is not so. We can wander; HE alone can restore. Naomi, restored from her wandering in the land of Moab, can say, “I went our,” but, she adds, “the LORD hath brought me home again.” She says, as it were, “I did the going out, but the LORD did the bringing back.” Blessed be His Name, He can, and He does, restore. Were it not so, the people of God on earth would be little more than a great company of backsliders.

Moreover, He does not only restore, but having restored, He leads us into “the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.” Alas! How often we may even in sincerity and zeal turn aside into paths of self-will, that are inconsistent with His Name, only to prove how little, in practice, we allow the LORD to lead us as our Shepherd. The path of righteousness, in which He leads, is a “narrow way” in which there is no room for the self-confidence of the flesh, and can only be trodden as we have the LORD as our Shepherd before us. Even so an Apostle found, when with real sincerity and zeal, and yet with great self-confidence, he said, “Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.”

Fourthly (v. 4), we have to face “**the valley of the shadow of death.**” Even if we are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, and have not personally to pass through death, yet, again and again, we have to face that dark valley as, one by one, our loved ones are taken from us. Then, in a wider sense, what is our passage through this world but a journey through the valley of the shadow of death? For, over all there sounds the toll of the passing bell.

Nevertheless, if the LORD is our Shepherd, we can say with the Psalmist, “I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me.” The Lord can say, “If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death” (Jn. 8:51). The Lord does not say, he will not pass through it, but he shall not see it. Those who stand round the death-bed of a dying saint may indeed see death, but the one that is actually stepping down into the dark valley sees JESUS. Even so, if we have to pass that way it is only

passing “through.” And the journey through is very short; for is it not written, “Absent from the body....present with the Lord?” And in that passage through the valley, not only is the Lord with us, but He is present with His rod and His staff - the rod to drive off every foe, the staff to support us in all our weakness.

Fifthly (v. 5), in this wilderness world we are surrounded by **enemies** that would rob us of the enjoyment of our blessings, and hinder our spiritual progress. But the LORD is our Shepherd who prepares a feast for us in the very presence of our enemies. And not only so, He prepares His people for the feast, for He anoints the head with oil, and not only fills the cup, but makes it run over. He does a great deal more for us than ever we did for Him in the days of His flesh; for, though one of the Pharisees desired Him that He would eat with him, and in wonderful grace the Lord sat down to meat in the Pharisee's house, yet, He has to say, “My head with oil thou didst not anoint.”

Sixthly (v. 6), there is **the daily path** that we have to tread “all the days” of our lives. Each day our life brings its ceaseless round of duties, difficulties, and circumstances, small and great. But if we follow the Shepherd we shall find that “goodness and mercy” will follow us. Were we nearer the Lord, following hard after the Shepherd, should we not with clearer vision trace His hand in the little things of the daily life, and discover therein His goodness and mercy?

Seventhly, and lastly, looking beyond the days of our life into the great eternity that stretches beyond, we see that if the LORD is our Shepherd, it is not only to lead us through the wilderness, but, at last to bring us home to “dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.” For the Christian it is the Father's house; there to **dwell** beyond all bodily wants, with every spiritual longing met, where no failure can intrude, no hearts grow cold, no shadow of death can come, no enemy approach, but where, indeed, the cup will run over. “The days of my life” will end “in the house of the LORD for ever.” In that great home gathering not one of His sheep will be missing. “Those that Thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost” (Jn. 17:12). Long years ago the saintly Rutherford wrote, “What think ye of His love? What of these feet that went up and down the world to see His Father's lost sheep, pierced with nails? The eyes that were oft lift up

to heaven unto God in prayer, wearied with tears? His head pierced with thorns? The face that is fairer than the sun, all maimed, and the hair pulled out of His cheeks? He took shame and gave you glory. He took the curse, and gave you the blessing, He took death, and gave you life...As the Chief Shepherd, He shall make an account of all His lambs, and tell His Father, these be all My sheep. I went through the woods and waters, and briers, and thorns, to gather them in, and My feet were pricked and My hands and My side pierced, ere I could get a grip of them; but now here they are.”

Remembering all that He has done for us in the past, when, as the Good Shepherd, He gave His life for the sheep; knowing all that He will yet do for us when He comes as the Chief Shepherd, we may look up into His face during our present wilderness journey say, “The Lord is my Shepherd.”

We follow in His footsteps;
What if our feet be torn?
Where He has marked the Pathway
All hail the briar and thorn.

Hamilton Smith

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Q: Why do we not now fast, as they did in the early days of the church; also in 1 Cor. 7:5? **B.L.N.**

A: *Nesetia* derives from *ne*, a negative prefix, and *esthio*, to eat. It indicates that the literal meaning of fasting is abstinence from food. Fasting was both individual, as in the case of the Lord Jesus (Mat. 4:2), David (2 Sam. 12:16), and Nehemiah (1:4); and also collective, as in Ez. 8:21 and Acts 13:2-3.

With this in mind, I would like to suggest what the spiritual gain of fasting is:

- It demonstrates that what sustains us is not bread alone, but every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God (Mat. 4:4).
- By it, we deny self daily from what is natural and practice reliance upon God. Note that fasting is always carried by prayer (Lu. 2:37).
- It is used to seek God about a special need, as seen in David, Nehemiah, Ezra, Esther, and others.
- It demonstrates God’s power being perfected in weakness (Mat. 17:21 and Ps. 109:24).

That we do not fast as in the early days of the assembly is an indication of our spiritual poverty and our lack of understanding of God’s mind as to fasting.

Much love in Christ,

J. A.

LOVE DISPLAYED

We'll praise thee glorious Lord,
Who died to set us free;
No earthly songs can joy afford
Like heavenly melody.

Love that no suffering stayed
We'll praise –true love divine;
Love that for us atonement made;
Love that has made us thine.

Love in the lonely life
Of sorrow here below
Thy word of grace, with mercy rife,
Make grateful praises flow!

Love that on death's dark vale
Its sweetest odors spread,
Where sin o'er all seemed to prevail
Redemption glory shed.

And now we see thee risen
Who once for us hast died,
Seated above the highest heaven,
The Father's glorified.

Soon wilt thou take thy throne,
Thy foes thy footstool made,
And take us with thee for thine own
In glory love displayed!

Jesus we wait for thee,
With thee to have our part;
What can full joy and blessing be
But being where thou art!

J. N. Darby

TROUBLE WITH THE DOOR

The renowned magician and escape artist, Houdini, could get out of any set of handcuffs, or any strait jacket that was ever put on him. In fact, he could release himself from almost any enclosure in less than one minute. Only once did he fail. That strange incident occurred when he was touring the British Isles. Arriving at a small town, he agreed to exhibit his ability by escaping from the local jail. The cell door was so ordinary looking that he smiled at the simplicity of the task. On the given signal he began to use all the terrific speed and dexterity he possessed to effect his release. To his great surprise, he was unable to pick the lock! Frantically he tried every device he knew, but nothing happened. For two more hours he worked feverishly. Finally, completely exhausted, he fell against the door and lamented his defeat. Immediately it sprang open. His frustration had been due to the fact that it had never been locked at all!

How frequently, by a similar ruse, Satan has deluded poor sinners who are seeking to find a way to open the door of salvation! They work, they cry, they fret, they pray – trying in every way possible to bring release to their captive souls.

Yet it is only when they fall exhausted from their own efforts, and rest their all against the “Door” – The Lord Jesus Christ – that they find the immediate release they so desperately seek.

You, who today are weeping and straining every nerve to escape the clutches of Satan, just let go, and let God do that which your feverish trying will never accomplish.

For having done all that is necessary to please God, the Savior now provides the only way to peace and Heaven. Lovingly, He still invites men to stop struggling and to enter by faith into the liberating joys of His free salvation!

The Lord Jesus said:

“I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved...”

John 10:9