

# GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH ~ MAKING DISCIPLES ~ EQUIPPING THE SAINTS FOR MINISTRY

PO Box 571 - Priest River, ID 83856 \* [www.gentleshepherd.com](http://www.gentleshepherd.com) \* December 2013

## The Odyssey Part 11 The Compass By Rayola Kelley

This month we will be celebrating Christmas. As we remember the events that ushered in what we consider to be the first Christmas over twenty centuries ago, we are reminded of four types of responses to the message that the Promised One of God, the Savior was born in Bethlehem. Although I have written about these four responses in the past, it is always a good practice to once again be reminded of them during this time of the year.



The first response towards the birth of the Savior was the innkeeper (*Luke 2:7*). He was not looking for the Messiah; rather, he was caught up with worldly activities; therefore, he was unprepared to receive the gift and become part of the miracle. Although his name remains unknown to the world, his response serves as an example of what happens when a person is full of the world and caught up with its events: he or she will be caught unprepared for the day of the Lord's visitation.

The second response came from the lowly shepherds. They witnessed the heavens open, and heard the glorious proclamations of the birth of a Savior in Bethlehem, along with the angelic host praising God (*Luke 2:8-18*). These men followed the angel's instruction and found the Promised One lying in a manger. There they worshipped Him. These insignificant shepherds remind us of who the Lord often chooses to use. He often looks for the outcasts, downtrodden, and unlikely, for they have nothing to lose

and everything to gain (*1 Corinthians 1:25-29*). They are the ones most likely to hear His call and properly respond in humility and meekness with an attitude of worship and a readiness to serve Him.

The third response is represented by Herod (*Matthew 2:1-7, 15-21*). He represents those who become jealous of the Promised One. Such jealousy produces tyrants. Tyrants have no desire to give way to heavenly rule. They will try to destroy any sign of opposition that will challenge their fragile position and authority. Herod destroyed the innocent lives of many to maintain a worldly reign that was temporary and destined to end upon his death. There is no indication that he repented of his murderous tyranny, and if so, he woke up in the tormenting bowels of hell.

The fourth response came from the wise men (*Matthew 2:1-12*). They came in search of the King of Israel, bearing gifts worthy of royalty. We can see in the first scenario of the innkeeper that the reality of the gift of God was hidden from him by the swirl of worldly ways. In the case of the shepherds, heaven parted and the light of the message of hope penetrated through the darkness of the night to bring hope to their souls. In the third response the light highlighted the prophecy as to where the King of Israel would be born, but God hid His Son from the destructive reach of the tyrant (*Matthew 2:12-14, 21*).

In the final response, the wise men were given a compass of a star in the sky to guide them to the King of Israel. For two years they followed the heavenly compass God provided for them. Their compass never wavered from the path and they never vacillated from their mission. Once again the four responses bring a clear contrast. The innkeeper failed to see the opportunity at hand to become part of something of eternal value, but the shepherds saw the Promise of God

and walked away rejoicing, while Herod missed Him altogether and left a legacy of wickedness and failure. However, in their odyssey the wise men found Him. The truth is we need to find Jesus, but we must be willing to search for Him, as well as possess the right compass to guide us to Him.

Last month I talked about the need to not only have in hand our spiritual map (God's Word), but that it is vital as believers to acquire the ability to read it and follow its instructions. This spiritual map will show us where we are at in our journey, but we also need to know which direction we are to walk in to ensure that we arrive at the right destination.

The one instrument that shows us the direction we are facing or walking in is a compass. Recently I learned some interesting facts about compasses that I did not previously possess. Granted, I know that a compass allows one to know the direction he or she is heading, but what I learned is that a compass is useless unless you know where you are. Admittedly, I should have known this, but I never thought about what it takes to use a compass properly.

To be able to go in the right direction, you have to know your present location. Location is everything because it will tell you what direction, north, south, west, or east you are from your desired destination. If you chose to go north, when in fact your destination is south of you, you will become lost as you go in the wrong direction. It is for this reason people who are heading in the wrong spiritual direction need to stop and repent in order to become pointed in the right direction.

As I listened to the explanation of how to properly use a compass, I realized that those teaching on the subject started their pupils from a place they were already familiar with, and would give them another location they were acquainted with so

they could discover the direction they were walking in, thereby, learning how to properly use the compass.

As I thought about the practical logic in using a compass, I began to relate it to how our spiritual compass works. Granted, God's Word helps us figure out our location. It gives us road signs and instructions as to what to watch for to avoid detours. However, our compass will show us the direction we are walking in or we need to walk in once we understand where we are in our spiritual journey.

For the wise men they had traveled in the direction of the star. They did not know exactly where they were going, but they knew the star would lead them to the right place. They knew they could not lose sight of their compass or they would become lost and their ultimate destination would also become lost to them. What is interesting is that when they stopped for directions to inquire about their destination, God's Word was consulted, and the prophecy in *Micah 5:2* revealed to them that their desired destination was Bethlehem.

This brings me to the identity of our compass: it is the Holy Spirit. The Bible tells us we must walk after the Spirit (*Romans 8:1*). This means we must be quick to allow Him to guide us in the way we are to walk. Like the children of Israel, they followed the pillar of cloud by day and rested in the light of a pillar of fire by night (*Exodus 13:21-22*). They did not move unless the cloud moved. Here we have a beautiful example of what it means to follow after the Holy Spirit.

And, where will the Spirit lead us: into all truth (*John 16:13*). The truths of God will never lead us astray. They stand as reliable boundaries that will keep us in the straight and narrow ways of righteousness. We know that the Holy Spirit inspired God's Word (*2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21*). He was the ink that wrote the truths upon the hearts and minds of people so they could walk in them (*2 Corinthians 3:3; Hebrews 8:10*). It is for this reason that we must consult the Word first to see if we are where we need to be to ensure the integrity and success of our walk. It is from a reliable location that we can be as-

sured that our heavenly Guide will reveal the way in which we are to walk.

The Bible also states that once we learn what it means to walk after the Spirit that we will begin to be led by the Spirit (*Romans 8:14-17*). The Spirit initially must lead us into all truth so that we can understand what it means to be an adopted child of God. Without the discipline of being led into a greater life in Christ, we will not be able to discern where we are in our standing before the Lord. After all, if we are being led by the Spirit, the signs we will read along the narrow way will point to being righteous (in right standing with God through redemption), acquiring and growing in God's love (being compelled by the right motive) and finding His peace (walking in a right state because of faith and reconciliation).

Once we develop the discipline that comes out of being led by the Spirit, we will discover what it means to walk, or live, in the Spirit (*Galatians 5:16-17*). Those who understand the Spirit-filled life realize that it is experienced once they learn what it means to live in the flow of the Spirit. To live in the flow of the Spirit means one is putting off the old besetting ways and giving way to the new in order to walk in His will, and reach the high calling of Christ Jesus.

To walk *after* the Spirit puts you in the living Waters to be cleansed and sanctified. To be *led* by the Spirit puts you in the current to be established and prepared for the next state: to walk or *live in* the Spirit. To live in the Spirit means to be in the flow of the current. The differences between being in the current and flow of the Spirit, is that we can find ourselves fighting against the current when fast waters of fear overtake us or the dams of self and uncertainty threaten to stop our progress; but, when one is in the flow of the Spirit, he or she will be taken on a ride. In other words, there is no conflict from the flesh trying to take over, no obstacles from the world trying to take hold, and no present cares consuming one's attention. In the consuming flow of the Spirit such things become dim in light of the glorious revelation or work of the Spirit that is taking place. His work will always bring us in line with the will of God.

When I think about the percentage of time that I truly live in the Spirit,

I have to admit that it is not very high. In my mind there is no greater place to be than living in the Spirit, but I also live in the flesh, walk in the world, and become burdened down with the demands of life. At times I battle bouts of utter defeat when I realize that the lusts of the "old man" have managed to climb on top of my "new man". Occasionally, I have been slow in recognizing it, but when I pay attention to the signs, I realize they are putting up red flags. These signs can read, "lousy attitude", "snippy mannerisms", "impatient ways", "complacent reaction," and so forth.

When I realize that the old man has been resurrected and standing on the pinnacle of foolishness, I have to kick the props of ridiculousness from beneath him and wrestle his members to the mat so that I can drag him to the cross where he is once again nailed (*1 Corinthians 9:21-27*). At times the struggles to bring the "old man" to his proper place and keep him there have been intense. The "old man" is a whiner. He is always crying foul, and declaring that it is so unfair. Or, he plays dead so that he does not have to face the inevitable. At times he even tries to con me that he is changed, rehabilitated, and that I am being unloving and fanatical. Regardless of his ploys, the "old man" is a coward and is the enemy of that which has been ordained righteous for my life.

Once the "old man" is nailed to the cross, I am then able to repent of giving way to the "old man" and refocus on the Lord and begin to follow after the Spirit, or I should say follow after what I know is right. This allows me to once again get into the current of the Spirit.

Confronting the influence of the world is a little different. When I get caught up with the world, it takes me out of the current of the Spirit and puts me in another current. The current of the world is fast moving. It holds many rapids of sensationalism and provides the lusts of the "old man" with "surf boards" or "water skis" of false promises. It declares it will lead one to great happiness and satisfaction.

The problem with riding the rapids of the world is, it is hard to see the warning signs that have been posted

along the way about the impending dangers ahead. Since the world is temporary, there are many shallow parts that will cause one to hazardously hit the ground of reality going at fast speeds. There are signs of dangerous rapids that are impossible to maneuver that will leave one spiritually shipwrecked. There are warnings of waterfalls that will consume the person and entangle him or her in whirlpools that speak of loss and destruction. There are signs warning of sharp turns, limited visibility, and fast descent that speak of blindness, unexpected experiences, and ignorance that will produce nightmarish results.

It is easy to find yourself in the current of the world. However, the world is at odds with God and will keep you from realizing the excellent calling of Christ Jesus in your life (*James 4:4*). It is a detour from what is best. For this reason, the quicker you recognize it and look for that immovable Rock in order to get your footing, the easier it is to get out of the current's momentum. Keep in mind, no matter how fast the currents of the world are, the Lord has provided the Rock which you can reach for and cling to.

Once I get my footing on the Rock I then must repent of allowing myself to get caught up in the wrong current. It is from this position that I can now choose to get in the right current of the Spirit. This entails exposing myself to the things of God. I have to get into His Word, desire His perspective, ask His Spirit to reveal my moral flaws that subject me to the contrary current of the world, and once again consecrate my whole life to the Lord.

I am thankful that God has provided me with such an efficient compass. The Holy Spirit will never be found to be wrong. He will always lead me to a life that will reflect Christ and bring glory to God.

As we embark on this Christmas celebration, we need to make sure that we are correctly reading our spiritual map and following the direction that the Holy Spirit is leading. This Christmas let us be like the wise men and bring gifts worthy of our Lord. They brought gold which reminds us that God was very much a part of providing the ultimate gift of His Son.

Clothed in humanity, deity had been miraculously veiled in the baby born in a manger. The myrrh was highly valued and was used as one of the ingredients in the anointing oil used in the tabernacle. It reminds us that anointing flows from above in the person of the Holy Spirit. The frankincense was used in the holy perfume used in the tabernacle. It was a preferred fragrance. We are reminded that it is the life of Christ in us that serves as a preferred fragrance to God, a point of edification to believers, and a mirror of contrast to the unsaved.

However, in order to present such a fragrance to God, we need to be anointed by the Holy Spirit from above and maintain a correct understanding of Jesus Christ, an understanding that will cause us to walk as He walked. And, to reciprocate by giving His Son back to the Father in this way would surely be the most acceptable and pleasing gift we could offer Him.

Have a Merry Christmas. ✚

## IN DEFENSE OF THE FAITH By Dave Hunt

Biblical Answers to Challenging Questions (From The Berean Call)

*"Nothing Exists Except God"?*

Question: I saw an interview with Sir John Marks Templeton in Robert Schuller's *Possibilities* magazine. He is the man who awards the annual Templeton Prize for promoting an appreciation of the benefits of all the world's religions. I was shocked to read in the interview that Templeton believes that "nothing exists except God." I'm confused. I thought this was pantheism, yet there it was promoted in the magazine of a man who is looked up to as an evangelical leader. How can this be?

Response: It is pantheism. It is also a basic tenet of cults such as Science of Mind, Religious Science, and Christian Science. What they teach is basically the same as Peale's positive thinking and Schuller's possibility thinking, which explains why the latter would promote it in his magazine. Here is how "nothing exists except God" works in the mind science and positive/possibility thinking arena: God is good

and God is all. Therefore, all is good. Thus, anything that isn't good—sin, sickness, suffering, death, etc.—is not real but is a delusion of one's negative thinking. The way to be delivered from these negative delusions is to become a positive or a possibility thinker.

The Bible, however, teaches that sin, suffering, sickness, and death are real indeed. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (*Ezekiel:18:4*) is the pronouncement of God's just judgment and certainly treats both sin and death as real. Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead. He didn't teach them to deny the reality of these things through positive thinking or possibility thinking. Such concepts are completely alien to the Bible.

Our deliverance from sin and death comes not by denying the reality of these evils through the power of the mind, but by faith in Christ, who suffered the agony of the Cross and paid the penalty that His own justice had pronounced upon sin. He died for our sins and "was raised again for our justification" (*Romans:4:25*). If sin and death don't exist, then the death of Christ for our sins and His resurrection are merely allegories and not real events—contrary to the historical facts.

If "nothing exists except God," then the universe is God, and we ourselves are all part of God and thus divine and perfect beings. Indeed, if "nothing exists except God," then Satan, who is certainly presented in the Bible as real, is God. One could not imagine a greater delusion.

The God of the Bible is separate and distinct from His creation, which He made out of nothing. That creation is running down like a clock because it is separated from Him by the rebellion of His creatures (Satan and his minions joined by mankind), a rebellion that caused God to pronounce His judgment upon this entire creation. If God were the universe, then He too would be running down like a clock. That is *not* the God of the Bible!

— *An excerpt from In Defense of the Faith* (pp. 54-56) by Dave Hunt

## BECAUSE I SAY SO

### Part Two

By Jeannette Haley

*“Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up” Hosea 6:1.*

In Part One of this article, the occult origins of the “Name It and Claim It,” “Positive Confession/Word Faith” movement was briefly outlined, along with a comparison of these heretical teachings with God’s Word. Part 1 also revealed how popular verses are taken out of context, misquoted, and used as a mantra relating to physical healing by the “positive confession” camp. Keep in mind, shamans and witches have been familiar with this practice for centuries. Faith in the power of our words is witchcraft, and people who practice such can unwittingly open the door to demons, spirit guides, familiar spirits, and a religious spirit, which is common within the Church. As with any verse of the Bible, if read in context it becomes clear that such promises are often of a two-fold nature; that is, spiritual healing when a person receives Christ, and total physical healing promised at the resurrection. This does not mean to say that physical healings do not occur, for they do, and probably more often than most of us know, or think. The facts bear testimony that this is true, especially in countries where the Gospel is preached to those who have never heard it, as miracles confirm the message, and draw people to Jesus who is Lord of all.

When Jesus read from the Book of Isaiah, *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord” Luke 4:18, 19*, He was not talking about making the poor rich and wealthy, nor was He talking about causing every physically blind person to see. While our Lord did heal the blind, He did not heal everyone who was blind. This may seem “unfair” to our heightened religious sensitivities, but who can cast doubt and judgment upon the sovereign Creator and Lord

who does all things for His glory, and who does “all things well?” We know that God is “no respecter of persons” so we must also believe that Jesus didn’t heal His “favorite” people while leaving others to suffer.

It is encouraging to know that God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and everywhere present. Psalm 139 leads us to understand how intimate and personal our God is. *“O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me” Psalm 139:1-10.* Read the entire Psalm in your Bible, for there you will be reminded that God knew you before you were born. Therefore, does not the God of heaven and earth know where the afflicted are—where *you* are? He has His reasons why some are healed in this life while others are not, and those reasons vary depending on the situation, and what the Lord is working into His vessels in order to bring them deeper, and higher in Him, and to bring Him glory through these living witnesses.

Consider the well-known Joni Eareckson Tada. A diving accident in 1967 when she was only seventeen left her a quadriplegic in a wheelchair. Today, she is an internationally known mouth artist, a talented vocalist, a radio host, an author of 17 books and an advocate for disabled persons worldwide. What many people may not realize is the incredible struggles Joni went through in order to accept God’s design in her paralysis. Today, her testimony, and ministry to others, has had a powerful impact on people the world over. Those who know her

life story know that she did implore the Lord to heal her, as well as many praying Christians. But, God had other plans for her life in this world, and to that end she has been faithful. She knows that her healing is laid up for her in eternity, along with her rewards, and she surely relates to the Apostle Paul’s words, *“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” Romans 8:18.* Concerning his infirmities, Paul declared, *“For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he [Jesus] said unto me, ‘My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” 2 Corinthians 12:8-10.* In 2 Timothy 2:12 he wrote, *“If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.”*

One of the verses that is usually quoted by Christians when praying for the sick is *Isaiah 53:5b*, *“with his stripes we are healed.”* This entire chapter in *Isaiah* is a complete description of the Lord Jesus Christ, and His suffering, and death for our transgressions, sins, and iniquities. When taken in context, this verse means that by His stripes we are healed of our broken hearts and lives that have occurred because of sin. When a person becomes a born again believer, he or she is not automatically exempt from any type of discomfort, distress, or disease. If Jesus had come healing all the people, feeding all the people, and raising all the dead, don’t you think that all the people would have been tempted to become “converted” simply for the benefits? As it was, they wanted to take Him, and make Him king. But, it was not the right time. Jesus did not come two-thousand years ago to be Israel’s king, but to die for the sins of the world. *“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...” 1 Timothy 1:15a.* (Emphasis added.)

God has His timing for every-

thing, and God's timing also reveals His intimate knowledge of us, and how He is working for our ultimate good, and His glory whether it involves healing, or any other challenge that we may face. Humanly speaking, we don't want to face the fact that the suffering and martyrdom of His saints is a great witness to the ungodly, the scoffers, the atheists, the lukewarm, and the unbelieving of His reality, love, and greatness. Sometimes, whether we want to admit it or not, miracles of healing do not always result in souls saved, or lives changed, but instead more often result in people chasing after signs and wonders rather than seeking the face of the Lord for forgiveness and salvation.

The "positive confessors" ignore Scriptures concerning affliction because, in their perverted belief system, any affliction, physical or otherwise, is "negative," and therefore it doesn't exist in God's realm. However, *Psalm 199:67* is a beautiful verse in its humility, truthfulness, wisdom, and victory: "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word." Affliction caused the writer of this Psalm, who had gone astray, to be converted to the ways of righteousness through keeping God's Word. Consider Jonah. God used affliction to get Jonah's attention when he failed to keep his vow, and fled from the presence of the Lord. "I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice" *Jonah 2:2*. Jonah admitted, "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD" *Jonah 2:8, 9*.

Affliction is not always administered to those who have gone astray, but is sometimes a point of testing to the righteous, which also serves as a testimony to men and angels. Consider Job, who was afflicted, not for faithlessness, idolatry, transgression, sin or iniquity, but because of righteousness! "And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil" *Job 1:8*? Job was tested

with great loss, and indescribable grief, accompanied by extreme physical suffering, and agony. But, he passed the test of his faith, and declared, "As God liveth, who hath taken away my judgment: and the Almighty, who hath vexed my soul; All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils; My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit...till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach [me] so long as I live" *Job 27:2-6*. Concerning affliction, Job said in *Job 5:17*, "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty." Job expressed great faith when he declared, "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" *Job 23:10*, which reminds us of the words of the Apostle Peter, writing to Christians, in *1 Peter 1:7*, "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

The truth is, there are times when God's saints are plunged into extreme trials, tribulations, and testing. Remember Daniel in the lion's den, and the three Hebrew children in the fiery, burning furnace, and the suffering and martyrdom of tens of thousands of God's prophets and faithful saints through the ages, including the disciples of our Lord (except for John the Beloved.) Again, to quote from the lips of Job who uttered this priceless, golden nugget of unfeigned faith, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" *Job 13:15a*. This is the bottom line of the matter—do you and I trust Him regardless of the process He allows us to go through? Do we trust Him even unto death, and beyond?

King David in *Psalm 66* exhorts us to praise God, even though we experience the Refiner's fire, "O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard: Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved. For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried. Thou broughtest us into the net; thou laidst affliction upon our loins. Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire

and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place" vs. 8-12. David is imploring the people to praise God, for He is the Almighty God. He alone holds our soul in life—he alone is the Giver of life, and He alone can keep us established that our feet (faith) will not be moved. We cannot save our own souls, we cannot establish ourselves. It is all the work of the Lord. He alone is worthy to be praised. David goes on to say that God proves (tests) us (our faith, dependence, reliance on Him) with fiery testing (as silver is purified.) God even brings us into places where we cannot save ourselves no matter our much we struggle, or how clever we think we are. We suffer affliction, and that at the hands of other people who know not God, and couldn't care less about us. God takes us through trials of fire and floods of despair, all to bring us to a place of purification and total consecration to Him, to build character in us as we make the right decisions, and choices, and to ultimately make us into the image of Christ.

Bob Sorge wrote "God's first priority in our lives is to make us fruitful—it is not first and foremost to make us comfortable." This statement turns the Americanized version of Christianity on its head. We have become so coddled, pampered, protected, and indoctrinated by religious "westernized" propaganda that negates most of what the Scriptures tell us about God that the modern church would be all but unrecognizable to the Apostle Paul or the other disciples. Who trembles at His Word in our time? Concerning the fire, Sorge wrote: "God is a holy fire, and He burns away impurities from our lives so that we might stand completely purified in His presence. Several scriptural passages describe God as a refiner in His presence. Several scriptural passages describe God as a refiner of our hearts, much like a blacksmith refines gold or silver in a furnace." (*The Fire of Delayed Answers* by Bob Sorge, pg.13.) (For further study see, *Psalm 66:10*; *Isaiah 48:10*; *Zechariah 13:9*; *Malachi 3:2-3*.)

*Ephesians 6:11-18* describes the Christian's armor that enables us to stand, and we read in *2 Timothy 2:3*, "Thou therefore endure hardness, as

a good soldier of Jesus Christ." The hardness, and suffering we may experience in God's "boot camp" is merely preparation for the afflictions, tribulations, trials, and testing of the spiritual war God's soldiers face, including the laying down of our lives if need be. Jesus said, *"But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved"* Matthew 24:13. We read in Hebrews 10:33, *"But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions, and in verse 35, "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward."* According to Strong's Concordance, "endure" means remain, undergo, bear trials, have fortitude, persevere, abide, take patiently, suffer.

Satan's aim is to destroy our faith, and he will use any means he can to do just that. Keep in mind, Satan means "slanderer." His aim is to destroy our faith (for *"the just shall live by faith"*) by slandering, blaming, and accusing God for the calamities, and misery Satan himself causes. Sometimes sickness is an outright frontal attack of the enemy, such as was the case with the woman Jesus healed who had a *"spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself,"* Luke 13:11. Jesus declared that this woman was a *"daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound"* (verse 16) meaning she was a woman of faith. This infirmity was a direct assault from Satan, and not the result of any sin which she had committed.

Indirectly sin is the cause of all suffering in this world, for both man and beast; however, we cannot assume to know the direct cause of sickness, disease, and suffering in others unless the Lord shows us, and if He shows us, it is not for the purpose of misdirected judgment but of strong prayer, and intercession, and sometimes deliverance. In the case of the man born blind whom Jesus healed, Jesus told His disciples, *Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him"* John 9:3. After Jesus healed the impotent man, He found him in the temple, and said to him, *"Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto*

*thee"* John 5:14. This sobering statement reveals that there are indeed times when a person can bring physical suffering upon him or herself through sin. Such is the plight of those with AIDS who practice the iniquity of homosexuality. People who neglect their bodies through poor eating habits, and lifestyles eventually suffer the consequences; and, we all suffer to some extent from the chemical toxins in our air, water, and food that we have no control over. Remember Paul's *"beloved brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier"* who was *"sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him."* *"Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death not regarding his life..."* ((See *Phillipians 2:25-30.*)

God has a plan for you and me, and this means that He must first prepare us in order for this plan to be worked out in our lives. He knows just how much heat we can endure so that we will come forth as worthy vessels for His glory. The vessel who has experienced the Refiner's fire, and who has been humbled, and purified in the ovens of affliction is ably equipped to compassionately enter in with others in their sufferings. The Apostle Paul, who himself suffered from a "thorn in the flesh" which the Lord gave him, wrote, *"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort: Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God"* 2 Corinthians 1:3,4.

Finally, take heart in these eternal words from 1 Peter 5:10-11, *"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."* †

### FOR YOUR HEALTH

*"A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones."* - Proverbs 17:22

*"But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."* - Isaiah 40:31

### WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT From C.H. Spurgeon

"Remember the word unto Thy servant, upon which Thou hast caused me to hope." - Psalm 119:49

Whatever your especial need may be, you may readily find some promise in the Bible suited to it. Are you faint and feeble because your way is rough and you are weary? Here is the promise - "He giveth power to the faint." When you read such a promise, take it back to the great Promiser, and ask Him to fulfil His own word. Are you seeking after Christ, and thirsting for closer communion with Him? This promise shines like a star upon you "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." Take that promise to the throne continually; do not plead anything else, but go to God over and over again with this - "Lord, Thou hast said it, do as Thou hast said." Are you distressed because of sin, and burdened with the heavy load of your iniquities? Listen to these words - "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions, and will no more remember thy sins." You have no merit of your own to plead why He should pardon you, but plead His written engagements and He will perform them. Are you afraid lest you should not be able to hold on to the end, lest, after having thought yourself a child of God, you should prove a castaway? If that is your state, take this word of grace to the throne and plead it: "The mountains may depart, and the hills may be removed, but the covenant of My love shall not depart from thee." If you have lost the sweet sense of the Saviour's presence, and are seeking Him with a sorrowful heart, remember the promises: "Return unto Me, and I will return unto you;" "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee." Banquet your faith upon God's own word, and whatever your fears or wants, repair to the Bank of Faith with your Father's note of hand, saying, "Remember the word unto Thy servant, upon which Thou hast caused me to hope." ~~~ C.H. Spurgeon (1834 -1892)

## RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

### WHO IS REALLY SAVED?

**Q:** *I hear of various people who say they are saved, but they do not display any real fruits of salvation. I know salvation is free, but it appears as if many people who call themselves Christians are making it appear cheap and a one-time deal where they simply say the sinner's prayer, but continue on as always. I am confused. Is there any way you could clear this up for me?*

**A:** I agree it all seems quite confusing. I think one of the things that has brought confusion is that churches, especially in countries where there is some semblance of religious freedom such as America, have created various formulas and methods such as agreeing with the "four spiritual laws" of salvation, or saying the "sinner's prayer" as evidence of salvation. Don't get me wrong, people have been truly saved from some of these formulas and methods, but the lasting fruits that have come out of some of these methods prove to be mediocre at best and a failure at worst.

The truth is formulas and methods do not always work because people are at different levels in their lives when it comes to the issue of salvation. In my experiences I have seen people at different points. Some are desperate or anxious in their present situation, others are despairing, frustrated, fearful, or uncertain, and some are curious about the matter of salvation due to what has been said or has happened in the lives of others.

Even when it comes to these three groups, they can be broken down into smaller groups. For example, those who are desperate can be broken down to those who are simply looking for relief, or those who are looking for deliverance. There are those who are frustrated with the direction of their lives, and have questions or doubts about the simplicity or validity of salvation. There are people who want instant satisfaction (placated), or to feel good in their plight (lied to), or to be told everything will be alright no matter what is going on around them (false security).

It takes a real preparation and leading of the Spirit to be able to

properly evangelize, along with a healthy understanding of the Word of God. I realize that some believers may not be versed in Scripture; therefore, they must be ready to share their testimony at the right time.

The Holy Spirit will help believers to properly discern where people are in their spiritual state. This is important because the person must be ministered to where he or she is at in his or her spiritual struggles. For example, those who are anxious about their present status are so because of sin in their lives. This anxiety is the product of knowing they are in sin or feeling convicted about it (*Romans 1:19-20; John 16:8*). The message to these individuals is that they need to *repent*; in other words, turn from their sin and face God with the intent to agree with Him, confess their sins to Him, seeking mercy and forgiveness, and asking Him to come into their lives as Lord and Savior, and save them (*Luke 13:3, 5; 2 Peter 3:9*). However, the message of salvation must not simply be accepted at the mental level, but it must be received in the heart by faith as the very truth they must live by, and walk out daily in their lives by faith in the Son of God (*Romans 10:9, 10; Galatians 2:20*).

For those who are frustrated because they feel leanness in their spirit, or are carrying heavy burdens and uncertainty because of some type of loss or despair, and sense that there must be more to life than their present status, the message will be that of conversion to righteousness (the person of Jesus Christ) and not personal attempts associated with personal reformation, good works, or religious affiliation, instead of repentance from sin (*Matthew 18:3; 1 Corinthians 1:30*). These people are not struggling with sin, but the quality and meaning of life and have questions because life makes no sense. In such matters we know Christ is the only answer and solution that is able to bring peace and comfort to such a person.

True repentance will lead to conversion, while conversion will end with repentance of what was in light of past sin and what is in light of present struggles. However, conversion also points one forward in light of the walk of faith and a future hope. Keep in mind, inner struggles are often shrouded in confu-

sion and unbelief. Conversion includes repentance in the sense a person must turn away from something that is not working or is unfulfilling, but it goes further by pointing out what one needs to embrace in order to experience the new (*Luke 22:31-32*). We see this in the case of the woman at the well. Even though she was aware of her sinful life, she was not actually struggling with her sin, but with questions. Jesus pointed her to Himself as the answer to questions of the heart that were bringing her confusion. We see her being converted from her old ways to embrace and live a new way. We even see her initially becoming an evangelist in her own community (*John 4:9-30*). As these individuals come to terms with life in light of Christ, they will see that their old way is wrought with sin and plagued with the reality and ways of vanity and death and that they must now choose the new way of being constantly converted to that which is right and true (*James 5:19-20*).

When it comes to conversion, a contrast of Christ righteousness must be lifted up to show them that the Christian walk offers not only satisfaction through healing and restoration, but provides an excellent way of living that will prove to be challenging and rewarding in the end. Once again, the work of bringing such a contrast belongs to the Spirit of the Living God (*John 16:8*).

We are told that at the core of living in sin and confusion is unbelief towards the Son of God (*John 16:9*). Whether unbelief comes out in living contrary to the Lord or walking in the ways of the flesh and the world, it will manifest itself in unfruitful fruits of darkness. This brings me to the final group that can be encountered in churches. These are the people who are blinded by their own self-righteousness. They can talk the talk, but their walk reveals hypocrisy. These people are usually very judgmental and unloving towards others. They show tolerance towards you as long as you agree with them or serve their purpose. The only thing that can penetrate these people's blindness is the light of the truth of His Word (*John 8:31-36*).

It is important to point out that all matters of the flesh, the world, and

Satan have already been judged at the cross of Christ (*John 16:7-13*). On the great day when the Lord judges all matters, each person must be sure he or she is walking in the glorious light of His redemption and not in the darkness of the present age. As the Church of Christ, we must be Spirit led in all we do to maintain a family relationship and likeness with God (*John 1:12; Romans 8:13-17, 28-29*). It takes love for God, sensitivity towards others, and a sincere desire to be used of God to be effective ministers in the harvest field of the world. The other ingredient that needs to be added to this combination is the heartfelt, fervent prayers of the saints.

I do hope this answers your question. †

## People With Sore and Bruised Hearts

By J. R. Miller, "Daily Bible Readings in the Life of Christ" 1890)

When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house--she brought an alabaster jar of perfume" Luke 7:3

It is wonderful how genuine goodness draws to itself...the unfortunate, the troubled, the friendless, the outcast, the fallen.

Wherever Jesus went--these classes always found Him out and gathered about Him. It was because He was the true, unselfish friend of all men. They found sympathy in Him. He would listen to their story. Though He was the sinless One, there was yet no air of "I am holier than you" about Him. He was just as gentle to an outcast sinner--as to a religious Nicodemus. No matter who reached out a hand for help--He was ready to grasp it. One of the truest things ever said of Jesus, was the prophetic word concerning him, "He shall not break a bruised reed!" He always dealt most gently with sore spirits and with bruised hearts!

Those who want to be useful in this world--must have the same qualities as Jesus. There is a kind of false "holiness" which draws nobody to itself--but rather repels. Genuine holiness, however, wins its way everywhere into men's hearts. The secret

of it all, is in living "not to be served--but to serve;" in considering one's self not too good to serve the most unworthy of God's creatures. If we live in this world to be served--we shall be of no use to anyone. But if we live to minister to others, yearning to be of service to everyone we meet--then our life will be of great worth. The hungry-hearted and the soul-needy will be drawn to us--and God will love to put work into our hands.

We need, too, to train ourselves to exceeding gentleness in dealing with human souls in their spiritual crises. Many earnest people, in the excess of their zeal--do incalculable harm to those whom they greatly desire to help. People with sore and bruised hearts--usually need loving sympathy and strong, kindly friendship--much more than they need a lecture in theology!

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28 †

## BY OSWALD CHAMBERS

*And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power (Luke 4:32).*

The majority of Christian workers are trying to serve the Lord with their own convictions about how God ought to work. Too often we do not have real reliance on the Holy Spirit. God grant that we may learn to allow the Holy Spirit to introduce, through the agony of our intercession, the living Christ!

Are you willing to allow Jesus Christ to tramp on your life on His way to another sick soul? Do you know anything about giving one costly drop of blood for intercession? There are no lasting results in answer to prayer, unless that prayer costs somebody something. And though we are intent upon helping the lost, I fear that the Lord would say, "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin" (Hebrews 12:4).

When you discover a sin-sick soul, do you cry awhile and then go home and sleep? Instead take that soul before God and vicariously intercede until, by reliance on the Spirit of God, Jesus Christ is presented to that darkened, difficult life. There is no case too hard for Jesus Christ! †

## ROME: EARLY CHRISTIANS

The Christians in the early church thrived in the face of intense persecution by cruel government authorities. Their brothers and sisters were being tortured, maimed, burned, and murdered for the sake of Christ. Each martyred believer gave the other remaining believers even more resolve. They looked past their own fears for their lives and saw only the fields white for harvest as Jesus described those who are ready to accept Christ. They gave the following daring response to the judges and authorities in charge of the persecution:

And now O judges, go on with your show of justice, and you will be righteous in the opinion of the people as often as you make a sacrifice of Christians.

Crucify, torture, condemn, and grind us to powder. Your injustice is illustrious proof of our innocence, for the proof of this is that God permits us to suffer.

But do your worst, and create your inventions for tortures upon the Christians; it serves no purpose. You do, however, attract the world and make it more in love with our faith. The more you mow us down, the quicker we rise.

The Christian blood you shed is the seed you sow; it springs from the earth and increases all the more.

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*Though these words were written centuries ago, this message is still being fulfilled today. Over forty nations of the world are currently experiencing religious persecution. In many of these nations, however, the church is flourishing with new believers every season and increased boldness among its members. Persecution has not accomplished its goal of reducing the followers. In fact, it has often served to increase the number of those willing to sacrifice. As followers of Christ, we can view the opposition that patrols the fields of souls waiting to accept Christ as giants waiting to devour us. Or we can view the opposition as mere scarecrows—counterfeit images of fear. Will you enter the harvest fields to labor for Christ? —*

From The Voice of the Martyrs, *Extreme Devotion*, pg. 144