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RUNNING THE RACE

Part 7

Our Lens

By Rayola Kelley

For the last couple of months, I have been talking about possessing a right attitude in our Christian walk. If the right attitude is not present, Christians will be void of having the necessary commitment to finish the course set before them.

The truth is people are clearly on a journey to discover the essence of life. People look to various sources based on what they think will make them happy, successful, and/or their life meaningful. However, the real purpose of life cannot be discovered unless knowing and experiencing the reality of God is the main focus of a person's journey. We must first understand what the Creator had in mind when He created Adam out of the dust of the ground and formed within him the type of spirit that would enable him to walk and commune with Him.

A big part of what determines our heart attitude is the perception we adopt about the Lord. This perception will establish how we not only look at God, but His Word, and life in general. We will view our different experiences through this lens and draw conclusions about what we think is reality. Jesus warned us about this in *Matthew 6:22-23*, "*The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!*"

The truth about the significance of our perception was recently brought to the forefront by a Christian video called "Journey to Christmas" about five people's journey to discover Christmas. They were all from different backgrounds and experiences, and it appears that they are all Cana-

dian. It was interesting to know the reason for them taking this particular journey that would last 20 days and would lead them supposedly down the same path of the wise men and Joseph and Mary in the Holy Land.



Each of these five people had different reasons, objectives, and expectations. For example, one man was experiencing a crisis in his faith. He wanted to have some type of experience to warrant what belief he had about God, as well as inspire an inner passion to continue his job as a Christian radio personality. It was apparent that he had become a skeptic and wanted to somehow have his faith confirmed to him according to some vague experience that would confirm his faith. It was obvious that he had no clue as to what he was looking for but it was clear he wanted to be revived.

There was a young man that had a Jewish father and a Christian mother. He was turned off to all religion and considered himself an agnostic but he wanted to see if there were any logical and historical connections that would warrant people's attraction towards religion.

There were also three young women who rounded out the group of five. One was a young First Nations woman. She had been exposed to Christianity but wanted to discover Jesus from a point of cultural identification because she perceived that He was only a religious figure that related to the white people, while another

woman was an artist whose parents were from different Christian faiths and she was seeking inspiration that would manifest itself in her ability to create greater art. The third young woman was a singer and had clarity about what constituted Christianity. She came so she could walk where Jesus walked and grow in her knowledge of the Lord.

The amazing thing about these five people is that they listened to each other, and never argued or tried to sway the others to their particular take on religion or Christmas. As I watched the series, I waited in expectation for each of them to come away with a greater sense of Jesus. After all, they were in the holy land. As I watched them travel over incredible terrain, walk through ruins of once great cities, witness breathtaking sunsets, wade in the waters of the Sea of Galilee, and hear the story of Christmas, I was waiting for that "wow-moment" to hit each one of them.

In a couple of cases the "wow-moment" happened, but when it came to perception, they walked away with the same opinion. The skeptic left a skeptic because he did not have the experience he was looking for. He chose to hold onto God because nothing else made sense to him, but it was clear that God did not have a hold of his heart. This man failed to realize that the greatest way you can experience God is through a relationship with Him based on a genuine faith towards Him. This man had no real faith because he never approached the Bible to simply believe what it said about God and His redemption to quiet his struggling heart. Without faith, any fleeting spiritual experience would become a poor substitute for any personal sustaining knowledge of God. The skeptic did not need to have some grand experience to fall on him so he could have faith that God truly existed; rather, He needed faith that would allow him to experience God, he needed

to see Jesus with the eyes of child-like faith (*Matthew 18:3-4; Hebrews 1:6*). What the skeptic did not realize is that there first must be faith directed towards God before the Jordan aters part to let God's people enter into His promises.

The agnostic walked away with an understanding that there was historical proof that the events of Christmas happened and why people may hold tightly to their religion, but he still maintained that he was an agnostic. Jesus may have become an historical figure to him, but his logic rejected the spiritual truths of who God is and His redemption. The truth is this young man had no intention of changing his mind about God; rather, he simply wanted to have his mind changed about religion, mainly his parents' involvement in religion. He did not like the fact that he was very critical and negative towards his parents and their beliefs because it caused him to lack the proper respect towards them.

As far as the girl who wanted to see if Jesus could fit into her culture, she concluded that since He was from a tribe, He could fit nicely into her culture. What this young woman failed to realize is that Jesus did not come to appeal to our cultures. In fact, He came from outside of all cultures and manifested Himself in the Jewish culture so He could be recognized as the Promised Messiah. It was this woman who needed to step outside of cultural understanding to encounter the one true God, creator of not only white people, but all people in order to relate to Jesus in His deity, humanity, and redemptive work. It is not up to God to lower Himself to our understanding and ways so we can believe; rather, it is up to us to choose to believe that the Lord is who He says He is so that His Spirit can begin to lift us up in our understanding about God and bring us into a saving knowledge of Him or closer walk with Him (*Isaiah 55:8-9*).

After her journey, the artist felt more in touch with how she could better express herself in her art. But the truth was she was more interested in the artistic, sentimental aspect of religion than the reality of its truths. She wanted emotional inspiration, that touch of spirituality that would connect the dots between both parents' be-

liefs. It was obvious that she possessed assumptions about her religious understanding and possibly struggled at different times with how to find common ground with what she had been taught. She wanted to somehow come to terms with what she needed to believe or know, thereby, expressing it in her art as a point of personal identification.

This brings me to the one person who clearly possessed a testimony of Christ, the Christian singer. It was clear there was a depth and clarity about her Christian life. Her response to her journey was refreshing. She saw the Creator's hand in the sunsets and varied landscapes; understood the depth of a seeking heart that was willing to travel great distances to pay honor to the King of the Jews like the wise men; and the sustaining faith of Joseph and Mary as they simply believed and obeyed in spite of the many challenges that confronted them. As she waded in the Sea of Galilee she remembered how Jesus taught there. She spurned the gaudy religious commercialism that she encountered at certain shrines; and, worshipped Him in song at places that possessed the simplicity that clearly invited the presence of God. Ultimately, she came out with a better sense of Jesus.

Jesus said it best, "Who do you say I am?" Due to unbelief the skeptics may have vague notions about God, but they do not possess Him. The agnostics may see themselves too intelligent to believe the simple truths of God, but the truth is in the end they will prove to be the most foolish of all. The ones who seek to relate to the Lord on a cultural level will never discover their true identity as a child of God, and those who want some emotional inspiration to define their religious understanding will find their inspiration waning and not sustaining.

Every person is on a journey of discovery. Granted, some become stuck in the ruts of familiarity, while others land at a certain place of understanding, deeming that they have arrived. There are those who seek to confirm their idea of reality, while others are trying to fit what they don't understand or agree with into their present reality. Clearly, the great ab-

horrence that many seem to have towards truth is making it a rarity in the world, causing those who are truth seekers to appear to be a relatively small group.

The problem is why do people insist on maintaining their own spiritual lens when it comes to God, especially since they will interpret everything they see through their particular lens? If people would choose to see God with child-like faith for Who He is, believe His Word is true, and obey what they know, they would be able to discover and see the real God of the Bible. They would know what truth is and would be able to confront the challenges of their faith and their life on a realistic plane.

As we face a New Year, we must as believers decide what kind of lens we will put on to interpret the matters of life around us. In order to accept the right lens, we must decide that regardless of how much truth may rock our foundation, shake our present religious structure, and throw us in a crisis of faith, we must be willing to lose and sell all to possess it (*Proverbs 23:23*). We cannot assume we know a matter until it has been confirmed by the Lord through His Word and by His Spirit. We must not presume that our doctrinal understanding is right until we first allow it to be shaken and tested to see if it will stand up to the complete counsel of the Word of God, ensuring that it is not propped up by some type of delusion or skepticism. We must seek God to know His truth, while tenaciously making sure that what we do understand or conclude is confirmed by spirit and in line with truth. In essence, we must choose to love the truth, not our personal take on it, but God's unadulterated truth found in His Word (*John 17:17; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12*).

We cannot run the race if we do not see clearly. We cannot finish the course unless we understand what we are looking for. We cannot expect to win the race unless we are willing to run it according to the rules established in God's Word. We cannot expect to experience victory unless we are willing to finish the race.

The attitudes of the people that took the Christmas journey possibly represent many who sit in churches.

They are considering the matters of God according to their own lens. Whether they are operating in a right spirit and according to the counsel of God's Word would be immaterial to them because in their mind their understanding and conclusions point to their form of truth. They feel justified in their doubts, rational in their conclusions, strong in their feelings, and loyal to their cultural understanding.

It is vital that as believers we test our lens to see if we are seeing clearly. If we are not we must allow God to give us the right prescription. It is only after we have the right lens to see through that we can be assured of starting out on the right path in 2017.

Once we make a determination to allow the course God set before us to discipline our walk, we must be willing to take the first step in this great adventure. Each step requires faith that God is faithful and we must understand that we will only arrive at our real destination when we obey the rules and keep our focus on the finish line. This brings me to what kind of attitude each of us needs to possess in order to avoid being deceived by some fleshly or worldly lens.

To personally answer this question I have often consulted those who have gone before me. The Bible is clear that these people never witnessed the promises of God being fulfilled in their lifetime but they still believed. These people believed because they also had the lens of faith to see their destination in a far distance. *Hebrews 11:16* gives us this insight, "But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city."

People of faith realize their real reward will not be obtained in this present life because it is not of this world. In *Hebrews 11*, some of these individuals received incredible promises, yet they realized that all the promises put together paled in comparison to the city God had prepared for them.

This brings us to the proper attitude that we need to possess. *Hebrews 11:13* gives us insight into the attitude, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off and were persuaded of them and embraced them, and confessed that they were

strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

When I consider the five people who embarked on the journey to discover Christmas, I realize that two of them were void of real faith, two possessed a misdirected faith, and one possessed true faith. Two were looking for something in this present world that would raise their faith out of skepticism and would adjust to cultural influence, while one was looking for something to revive inward inspiration, and one was an observer, really not looking for much. However, the Christian was always seeing beyond the present world, looking for the Lord, fully persuaded that she would see Him in His creation, in simplicity, and in what many would consider small, insignificant ways.

The attitude every believer must have is that of a stranger in the world and a spiritual pilgrim who is seeking a place where he or she has complete freedom to worship and serve his or her God. Notice how these people in *Hebrews 11*, "confessed they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." People who are bound to this world have a completely different attitude than those who are simply passing through it to a heavenly country. Those who are teetering between this present world and the next are often frustrated, unsatisfied, and unfulfilled. There are also those whose heart is with the world, but they give the impression that they love God and want to serve and please Him, yet they often have no concern for the lost and sometimes very little tolerance towards those who do not go along with them.

What can we learn about these strangers and pilgrims mentioned in *Hebrews 11*? First, they knew they were heirs of promises but they also knew that the greatest promises were attached to the world yet to come. Because they were focusing on a bigger prize than the promises attached to their present age, they held lightly to this world as they continued to look ahead to the real prize.

The reason they had such confidence was because they were persuaded that the promises were so. The apostle Paul was persuaded about something that clearly affected his life in Christ, "For the which cause I also suffered these things: neverthe-

less I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou has heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 1:12).

Believing comes before persuasion. Persuasion is a powerful word because it means one not only believes in the heart, but what he or she does believe serves as an anchor in the will, causing the person to be steadfast in the course that he or she is now persuaded to be intellectually so. In order to be a stranger and sojourner in this world, we as believers must be persuaded that in spite of being born into this world, our heart and citizenship belong to another country, another city that has been made by the very hands of God.

As we face a New Year, many will resurrect "old resolutions," with great expectation as their resolve reaches a pinnacle of zeal, only to wane within a few weeks where they will find that they are back to business as usual.

They have not learned that before a habit can be formed, there must be a change in attitude. A change in attitude does not happen until it takes on a vision and life of its own. It is when it has vision that it also has the ability to see the resolution as a worthy mission that is greater than one's own resolve. It will then seek the wisdom and a greater moral providence to bring it forth. That is why it only makes sense as we face uncertain times, that the proper resolution for believers is the urgency to make sure we are on the right path, and then we must stay the course, run the race, and reach forward with assurance that we will reach our ultimate destination.

We pray 2017 will be a blessed and rewarding year for you and your family. ✚

QUOTE

"You cannot approach the Word of God with your prejudices and own personal bias because you will never see God's truth. It will become dead letter to you. You must approach God's Word to seek God's truth." - Rayola Kelley

THE FLAMING SWORD

By Jeannette Haley

*"For our God is a consuming fire." –
Hebrews 12:29*

Here we go again, standing on the precipice of *Time*, the solitary entrance of the New Year looming before us, denying escape from the inevitable passing of *Time*. Hesitant mortality, uncertain, discomfited, defenseless, helpless to stop *Time*; compelled forward into the misty unknown, mocked by the invisible forces of created reality. We look back, reflecting on the past year, the mountains climbed, forests traversed, shadowy valleys journeyed, storms weathered, challenges faced, losses encountered, sorrows multiplied, and spiritual gains held dear—while struggling to prepare our hearts for the unknown future.

How can we face one hour, one day, one week, one month, and a New Year without the LORD and the flaming sword of His Word? He speaks to us through the written Word, and through the Holy Spirit when we worship in Spirit and in truth; when we pray in the Spirit; and when we meditate on His Word (which is not the same thing as eastern mystical contemplative meditation and prayer techniques that have infiltrated the churches). As believers we can be certain that God never changes, and His Word never changes, (with the exception of watered down, and perverted powerless "versions" of course.) We know that the triune Godhead has always been, and always will be and we can rest assured that His Word, all of it, is truth, and while not all of it may be written to us, all of it is written for us. (See *Matthew 4:4*.) Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" *John 17:17*. What greater power, what greater assurance, what greater source of comfort, what greater wisdom is there than the truth of God's Word? *Hebrews 4:12* tells us "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any *twoedged sword*, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." [Emphasis added.] Jesus demonstrated this in the temptation in the wilderness, silencing and vanquish-

ing the tempter with the words, "*It is written....*"

Simple, yet profound the flaming sword of God's Word is a terror to Communist regimes and socialists, anarchists, dictators, globalists, environmentalists, evolutionists, cults, false prophets and heretics, New Agers, secret societies, Satanists, atheists, liberal "intellectuals," hedonists, abortionists, and all other workers of iniquity in the kingdom of darkness. It is also a terror to the "prince of the power of the air," Satan, and his followers because he can only operate within the darkness of deception, delusion, and lies (propaganda). Therefore, we need to keep in mind that we live in a world where two kingdoms—the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light—compete for dominance. Which one people operate in depends on whether they love the truth, or not, and that truth is Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Jesus declared, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me*" *John 14:6*. [Emphasis added.]

In the beginning of earth's history, God separated, or divided the light from the darkness. "*And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness*" *Genesis 1:3, 4*. We need to keep in mind that the words "divided," "division," and "separation" are not equivalent to, nor should they be defined as either good or bad. There has always been division and separation in the world since the day that God divided the light from the darkness, which is good, and the day that Adam rebelled against God, causing separation, which was bad. The tragedy of the great separation that took place between man and God in the Garden revolves around two trees that were different from all the rest. One was the tree of life, the other the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which the Lord God told Adam he was to never partake of.

The question that has baffled so many since the beginning of time is why Adam failed to partake of the tree of life, and share it with Eve right from the start. Perhaps the tree of life wasn't as outwardly appealing as the

tree of knowledge of good and evil, just as "going to church," Bible studies, or following Christ in our day and age isn't half as appealing to the majority of the people, especially our youth, as involvement in Satanism, the occult, eastern religions and anything else that promises excitement, spiritual experiences, power and godhood. All these innumerable broad paths to destruction tantalize the intellect with promises of exotic experiences, metaphysical alternatives, power, and knowledge of the mysteries of the Universe. Sadly, every element of the kingdom of darkness has made inroads into Christian churches dressed up in various disguises sporting "Christian" labels which deceive many.

If Adam and Eve had loved the truth more than they desired to be as "gods," knowing good and evil, they would have obeyed the Lord. They would have fled from the presence of the father of lies, separating themselves from the temptation to disobey their Creator, and clung to the tree of life. Once their "eyes were opened" however, they knew there was no going back to their original state of innocence, and as we know, they proceeded to try and cover up their sin in their own way. Sin is the great separator between man and God, and once that first separation took place, "*the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life*" *Genesis 3:23, 24*.

What a sight that must have been! We can only try to imagine it—a flaming sword guarding and protecting the tree of life—the way, the truth, and the life that had been offered to the first man. George Kirkpatrick wrote, "God set Cherubim at the entrance of the garden to prohibit man's access to the Tree of Life. In their hands, He placed a flaming sword (singular - one). There is only one flaming sword. The word **flaming** means "*consuming fire*". The Bible reveals, "Our God is a consuming fire", *Hebrews 12:29*. The Bible speaks of two kinds of fire; first there is the fire of God's judgment; then there is the cleansing fire of the

Holy Spirit in our lives. The judgment fire destroys the flesh because of sin. The cleansing fire destroys the sin nature in the flesh so that man may live unto God. God's Word reveals this sword turned every way to keep sinful man from the Tree of Life. The Tree of Life is in the presence of God. When man chooses the mixed fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, he must be separated from the presence of God. Man has been trying to come back into the presence of God every way his heart can imagine. But he refuses to cease from partaking of the mixed fruit of the knowledge of good and evil.

"Man is unable to return to God's presence because he does not understand, nor allow the Spiritual application of God's Word to do its life-changing work in his life. Only the cleansing fire of the Holy Spirit can guide man through the gate to enter back into the presence of God. If man is to enter back into the presence of God, he must pass through the flaming sword. The flaming sword turns every way to purge man from his carnality, sin, and immaturity until the sinful, fleshly nature of man is dealt with. God has prepared a way for sinful man to enter through the gates into the eternal city of His presence and protection."

Regardless of the One Way that God offers, there is no end to the push towards "unity" through indoctrination, brainwashing, political correctness, and all the other garbage that makes up gross hypocrisy. The old saying, "All roads lead to Rome" is as true today as it has ever been as the drumbeat for a one-world, global religion continues to weave its way through all humanity. As for having a "divided nation," the truth is even if the outward appearance of "unity" is ever achieved, whether locally, nationally or globally, underneath it all there can be never be true agreement in spirit because it is impossible for light and darkness to become one, the children of light and the children of darkness can never be unified, there can be no agreement between good and evil, God and Satan, righteousness and sin, clean and unclean, or between the holy and the profane. The "flaming sword" that separates the holiness of God from the depravity of man is still

a flaming sword, brightly burning, and the day will come when *2 Thessalonians 1:8*, which declares "*In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*" will be fulfilled. It is an unchangeable fact that the flaming sword of the Lord divides and separates.

As for Christians, their unity is in the Spirit. When a believer meets a stranger who is also a child of God, there is an instant bond in the Spirit, an unseen current of communion, understanding, and agreement. While Christians don't all necessarily agree on outward things, they are one in the Spirit, joined together by the blood of Christ and share a common goal to obey and glorify God in whatever they say or do. Concerning being one in the Spirit, we read in *Ephesians 4:1-6* "*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*"

The fire of God was encountered by Abram as recorded in *Genesis 15*. I encourage you to read the entire chapter, noting in *verse 17*, "*And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces*" (of the offering on the altar that Abram made according to the Lord's instructions). Remember the Prophet Elijah who built an altar in the name of the LORD; made a trench around it, put wood on it, laid a bull-ock on the wood, and drenched it with water three times, then prayed, to the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, "*Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench*" *1 Kings 18:38*.

The fire of God is a consuming fire—consuming everything that is unholy, impure, defiled, and unclean. The fire of God purges purifies and

burns up the dross and that which is worthless out of our lives. The fire of God burns deeply, it cannot be ignored. Consider the Prophet Jeremiah who said, "*Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay*" *Jeremiah 20:9*. Is the Word of God a fire that burns so deeply in your heart and spirit that you can relate to the Prophet Jeremiah? Does the fire of His Word burn "in your bones" so much so you cannot hold back the words God has put in your heart and mouth, even though (like Jeremiah) you fear the anger and resentment you may face from those who resent God's flaming sword of truth? Many people, including Christians, have a hard time recognizing the fact that truth divides. Jesus said, "**Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.** For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" *Matthew 10:34-37*.

Consider the will of God concerning Moses, who was separated from his Hebrew family as a baby, raised in the royal courts of Pharaoh, separated from his prestigious life to become a shepherd in the desert, and then separated from that serene life to confront the Pharaoh to let God's people go. Moses initially encountered the fire of God when he was shepherding his father in law's flock, and going about his usual business on the backside of the desert. When he came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb, or Sinai, Moses was not expecting anything out of the ordinary to happen in this barren, uninhabited place; but he suddenly found himself encountering the fire of God. "*And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed*" *Exodus 3:2*. (The "angel of the LORD" in the

Old Testament was Jesus in His pre-incarnate state.) The sight of a burning bush that was not consumed captured Moses' curiosity. Then God called him out of the midst of the bush, saying, "Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I, And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" vs. 4b, 5. As God spoke to Moses out of the midst of the burning fire, He introduced Himself as I AM THAT I AM.

We know from the biblical account that Moses' life totally changed after this initial encounter with Jehovah God in the burning bush, but his experiences with the fire of God was not limited to this first experience. There was the plague of hail and fire that ran along the ground in Egypt (*Exodus 9:23*); the pillar of fire that gave the Israelites light to travel by night; and the fiery Mount Sinai upon which Moses received the Ten Commandments from the LORD. The fire of the Lord came into the tabernacle in the wilderness "there came a fire out from before the LORD, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces" *Leviticus 9:24*. We must not forget the fire of God's judgment when Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire before the LORD that He had not commanded them, "And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD" *Leviticus 10:2*. The Book of Leviticus ends with this verse, "For the cloud of the LORD was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys" *Leviticus 40:38*.

God prepared Moses to experience Him in holy fire, He then separated Moses from his life as a shepherd of sheep to become the leader and shepherd of God's chosen people. The fire of God burned in Moses' heart, flowed from his lips, giving him courage and power to be God's vessel to perform mighty miracles.

The application to us concerning the flaming fire of God, His sword and His Word, is when we offer ourselves to God as a "living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" *Hebrews 12:1b*, Je-

sus will baptize us with "the Holy Ghost, and with fire" *Matthew 3:11*. Just as the Children of Israel shrank back in fear from Mount Sinai and the presence of God, even fearing the shining reflection of God's glory on Moses' countenance, so too, many Christians today shrink back from any personal encounter with the LORD, fearing His flaming sword of separation from the unholy, the sword that requires complete surrender to the will of God, fearing it may cost them something they don't want to give up, fearing loss of control over their life. The sword of the Lord exposes and separates us from our excuses and wrong priorities, causing us to see our need to "get real" with God. The bottom line is you cannot have all of Jesus if He doesn't have all of you.

Have you recognized and encountered the sword of the Lord? Both Joshua and Gideon had an encounter with the sword of the Lord. In *Joshua 5:13-15* records, "And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, what saith my lord unto his servant? And the captain of the LORD's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so." If this man with the sword was not the pre-incarnate Jesus, Joshua would not have worshipped Him, nor would the ground upon which he stood been declared holy ground. The captain of the hosts of the Lord, with sword drawn, fought the battles for the Children of Israel as long as they walked in obedience. Concerning Gideon, the sword of the Lord fought for him and his three hundred men. In *Judges 7:20* we read "And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon."

Some references to the powerful,

flaming sword of God's Word—2 Thessalonians 2:8, "And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:" in *Revelation* Jesus warned, "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges" and "Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth" *Revelation 2:12, 16*; "And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God," *Revelation 19:15*.

We know that on the Day of Pentecost the fire of the Spirit fell on Jesus' disciples, who "with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren" *Acts 1:14b*, totaling about one-hundred and twenty people were praying and waiting for the promise from heaven. *Acts 2:1-4* says, "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." The Apostle Peter explained to the crowds gathered there that this was a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, saying "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" *Acts 2:17-21*.

How about you? Are you ready for the fire of God to have its way with your life? Have you come to God's altar, the Cross of Christ, and asked Jesus to you a living sacrifice? Maybe it's time you asked Jesus to baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" Acts 2:39. Is He calling you? ✠

TIMELESS TRUTHS OF TOZER

This is the season of change; and I say, let men change while God remains the same. I have seen eschatology change from a vivid eager expectation of Jesus to where we are now apologizing for the coming of Christ.

I have seen theology change in evangelical circles from certainty of the inspiration of Scriptures to uncertainty and an anemic apology. In evangelical circles, I have seen a change from believing that the church of Christ should separate from the world to a slow breaking down of that. It has come to a point where men are apologizing for our attitude toward the world and are trying to strike a common ground of understanding.

Obviously, we have forgotten what John said: "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).

We often hear the phrase, "New days call for new ways." I think Solomon said it best when he said, "There is no new thing under the sun" (Eccles. 1:9).

I have seen all of these new changes; but what cheers my heart is that God has not changed. The Bible has not changed. God's truth has not changed. The blood of Jesus has not changed. God still has the solution to our problems. Thank God, that has not changed.

"Holy Jesus, every day
keep us in the narrow way;
And when earthly things are past,
bring our ransomed souls at last
Where they need no star to guide,
where no clouds Thy glory hide.

William Chatterton Dix (1837-1898)

DO YOU KNOW HOW THE APOSTLES DIED?

(Note how many died taking the Gospel to the Gentiles)

Matthew-Suffered martyrdom in Ethiopia, killed by a sword wound.

Mark-Died in Alexandria, Egypt, after being dragged by horses through the streets until he was dead.

Luke-was hanged in Greece as a result of his tremendous preaching to the lost.

John-Faced martyrdom when he was boiled in huge basin of boiling oil during a wave of persecution in Rome .. However, he was miraculously delivered from death. John was then sentenced to the mines on the prison island of Patmos. He wrote his prophetic Book of Revelation on Patmos. The apostle John was later freed and returned to serve as Bishop of Edessa in modern Turkey. He died as an old man, the only apostle to die peacefully.

Peter-was crucified upside down on an x-shaped cross. According to church tradition it was because he told his tormentors that he felt unworthy to die in the same way that Jesus Christ had died.

James-Just The leader of the church in Jerusalem, was thrown over a hundred feet down from the southeast pinnacle of the Temple when he refused to deny his faith in Christ. When they discovered that he survived the fall, his enemies beat James to death with a fuller's club.* This was the same pinnacle where Satan had taken Jesus during the Temptation.

James the Great-son of Zebedee, was a fisherman by trade when Jesus called him to a life time of ministry. As a strong leader of the church, James was ultimately beheaded at Jerusalem. The Roman officer who guarded James watched amazed as James defended his faith at his trial. Later, the officer walked beside James to the place of execution. Overcome by conviction, he declared his new faith to the judge and knelt beside James to accept beheading as a Christian.

Bartholomew-also known as Nathaniel Was a missionary to Asia. He witnessed for our Lord in present day

Turkey .. Bartholomew was martyred for his preaching in Armenia where he was flayed to death by a whip.

Andrew-was crucified on an x-shaped cross in Patras, Greece. After being whipped severely by seven soldiers they tied his body to the cross with cords to prolong his agony. His followers reported that, when he was led toward the cross, Andrew saluted it in these words: 'I have long desired and expected this happy hour. The cross has been consecrated by the body of Christ hanging on it.' He continued to preach to his tormentors for two days until he expired.

Thomas-Was stabbed with a spear in India during one of his missionary trips to establish the church in the sub-continent.

Jude-Was killed with arrows when he refused to deny his faith in Christ.

Matthias-The apostle chosen to replace the traitor Judas Iscariot was stoned and then beheaded.

Barnabas-One of the group of seventy disciples, wrote the Epistle of Barnabas. He preached throughout Italy and Cyprus. Barnabas was stoned to death at Salonica.

Paul-Was tortured and then beheaded by the evil Emperor Nero at Rome in A.D. 67. Paul endured a lengthy imprisonment which allowed him to write his many epistles to the churches he had formed through out the Roman Empire. These letters, which taught many of the foundational doctrines of Christianity, form a large portion of the New Testament.

Perhaps this is a reminder to us that our sufferings here are indeed minor compared to the intense persecution and cold cruelty faced by the apostles/disciples during their times for the sake of their Faith.

And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: But he that endureth to the end shall be saved. *Matthew 10:22*

(<http://jrsbible.info/Apostles.htm>)

BACKSLIDING?

Taking it easy is often the prelude to backsliding. Comfort precedes collapse.—Vance Havner

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

Q: "How much should Christian Missionaries and other Christian workers try to save people's cultures? Isn't culture important?"



A: There is a real push of the world to save and preserve all cultures. Certain Americans take pride in the fact that we have so many multi-diverse cultures among us. When you study missionaries making inroads into foreign fields, it is of utmost importance that they first gain an understanding of cultural practices because these practices greatly influence the attitudes of people and how they interpret the world around them. By understanding the culture missionaries gain insight into the attitudes, perspectives, and stories of the people they minister to in order to properly relate to them and learn their "heart" language. When you consider such missionaries like Hudson Taylor, he realized dressing like the Chinese helped him greatly in relating to them so he could effectively present the Gospel.

But, as far as becoming part of the culture, adopting their thinking and all of their practices, that is a different story. The idea of cultures point to people being cultivated a certain way right down to what they worship, how they worship, along with their language, what they eat, how they think, the ways in which they celebrate, and their attitudes towards the various issues of life. Due to culture, people have a different way of expressing themselves and relating to one another, which not only creates misunderstandings, but prejudices. After all, many think their culture is better or more sophisticated than other cultures.

This brings us to the source of all cultures: they are a matter of this world. The world uses cultural differences to establish platforms that are designed to cause divisions so there is a need to control the masses by despots. Clearly, it does not matter how spiritual some cultures come across or how civilized they may be, at the core of all cultures are pagan ideas and practices, idolatrous preferences, perverted thinking, and un-

founded religious notions and superstition. Granted, Jesus entered by way of the Jewish culture which had types, patterns, and symbols established within its religious practices that pointed to the Messiah, but the Jews still perverted their religion with their traditions and unholy mixtures.

This brings us to a very important reality: Jesus died to save us from cultural influences. Our different cultures may bring distinction, but none of them can save us from the perversion, the arrogance, the prejudices, and the oppression many cultures promote. In fact, believers who once were part of oppressive cultures relish their new life and freedom in Christ and have no problem adopting a whole new way of living.

The Bible clearly addresses this matter. I remember how a Native American asked Jeannette how he was to handle his culture and practices in light of being a Christian. It became obvious to him that he could not bring Christianity and his culture together without compromising both of them (*Matthew 9:16-17*). It was then that Jeannette gave him *Acts 17:26*, "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation." (Emphasis added.)

The previous Scripture makes it clear that we are all of one blood and that the Lord has appointed the boundaries of people's habitation. The reason for this is explained in *Acts 17:27-28*, "*That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us. For in him we live, and move, and have our being, as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.*"

Galatians 3:28 takes away other differences that have divided people such as race, gender, and status, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*" This concept of being one is reinforced in *Ephesians 4:4-5*, "*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism.*"

Today the world clamors for equality in many different areas, and yet there is only one place that such equality can be found and that is in God's kingdom. All stand level in front of the cross of Christ, sinners in need of salvation, all have been offered the same gift of eternal life, and have been entrusted with the same commission. Each Christian is a member of one body, equally important in the function of the whole body.

Obviously, as Christians, there should be no divisions or prejudices based on race, gender, or status. The Apostle Paul counted the things of the world that brought distinction to him as dung (*Philippians 3:4-8*). We are to have the mind (attitude) of Christ, reflect His glory, and be walking, living epistles of His truths (*Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 32-3,17; Philippians 2:5*). We are new creations, reminding us that the old ways of cultures, worldly preferences, and fleshly practices are behind us as we embrace a new way (*2 Corinthians 5:17*). We are now citizens of a heavenly country, destined for an eternal city. As ambassadors of Jesus, we have a mandate to invite all to come to Jesus, receive His gift of life and be part of the kingdom of God and a heavenly family. Our inheritance is not based on a worldly family nor is our identification established according to ethnicity; rather, our sole identity is found in Christ Jesus.

The Apostle Paul may have become all things to all men to win a few, but he never gave up who he was in Christ to come into agreement with the world that he claimed was crucified to him and him to it (*Galatians 6:14*). He never compromised the truth, the Gospel, or his calling. He recognized culture and respected its influence on those around him, but he never let go of his mission, sway from the course, or fail to stand and fight when truth and souls were under siege.

As Christians we are not here to influence cultures, but what we possess, the Gospel has the power to change the landscape of men and women's souls, thereby, defining a whole new way of living for them. ☩

**HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL AND
SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR
FAITHFUL SUPPORTERS.**