

THE WORD OF TRUTH

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THE CHALLENGE STANDS

Quite a few years have passed since I made request of all who profess to be students and teachers of the Word of God to bring forth from the sacred Scriptures those passages which declare that the future home of any of the redeemed is to be in heaven. This request was made in view of my own stand that the earth, not heaven, is the future home of all of God's redeemed.

Since than a half-dozen or more passages have been put forth in support of the worldly and traditional view that our destiny is heaven, but when these passages have been honestly examined they have stubbornly refused to give the testimony for which they were called into the witness box. It has, therefore, become increasingly evident that those who hold the view that heaven is our future home have no real Biblical ground for their position. The notion that heaven is our future dwelling place is like the figment of "the immortality of the soul" This was held by the so-called "church fathers", it is taught by the commentaries, and rhapsodized by the hymn writers. It pervades the whole of the religious literature of so-called Christendom, and all this in spite of the fact that the immortality of the soul is never once mentioned in the Bible. And neither is the word *heaven* ever used in Scripture to denote the dwelling place of believers in the life to come.

In the Scripture we learn of some who have a great reward in heaven (Matt. 5:12); of men who are exhorted to lay up treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:20); of those whose names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20), but each one of these things were spoken to men who had been promised a place in the earth (Matt. 5:5). Yes, we go on to read of some whose hope is laid up for them in heaven (Col. 1:5); of others who have a better and enduring substance in heaven (Heb. 10:34); and of those who have an inheritance reserved in heaven (I Peter 1:4), but we never read that anyone is going there to live or that the future home of anyone is in heaven.

One writer takes refuge in the position that even though he is unable to bring forth any passages

that state that our future home is heaven, he insists "that Mr. Sellers is unable to bring forth a single passage that says our future home is upon the earth." He seems to feel that this results in a stalemate with the victory being awarded to him because of default, especially so since his view is supported by the church fathers, the commentators, and the hymn writers. However, it is quite incorrect for him to say that I have no Scripture to support my position. I know of no doctrine that has a more solid foundation in Scripture than the belief that our future home is to be upon this earth.

God's Latest Word

In handling the Word of God I never deviate from the principle that we should search until we find God's latest declaration upon the subject. Revelation is usually progressive and the latest word is the important word. This may only reiterate and confirm what was said before, but it may also cancel what was said before and bring forth a new revelation. We find a clear example of this in the words of our Lord spoken to His disciples in Matthew 10:9-10 wherein He said:

Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purse, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of His meat.

These plain directives were given to be obeyed, and it seems that the twelve disciples obeyed them to the letter. There are still some today who seek to obey these words, taking upon themselves vows of poverty, and as a result are considered by men to be quite holy for so doing. But any attempt to follow today these commands of our Lord is nothing more than acting in self-will, since these words are not the latest words of our Lord in regard to this matter. About three years later He said to these same men:

When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, Nothing. Then said He unto them But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one. Luke 22:35, 36.

From these two passages it can be seen that the later word of our Lord cancelled His previous orders to them and also gave a new revelation. The latest word is always the important word.

In applying this principle to the view that the earth is our future home, this is what we will find. In Psalm 37 we have three plain statements.

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. Psalm 37:9.

But the meek shall inherit the earth and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. Psalm 37:11.

For such as are blessed of Him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of Him shall be cut off. Psalm 37:22.

Another statement is found in Proverbs 11:31:

Behold the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner.

In these passages we have the witness of God in regard to the place where the redeemed will be blessed. Some feel free to ignore these statements by saying that they are only for Israel, but those who say this should stand ready to produce the passages that make heaven to be the destiny of those outside of Israel. There is no discrimination in these passages so far as Jew and Gentile is concerned. The truth can be summed up in one statement: "They that are blessed of Him shall inherit the earth." To inherit is to be allotted a place or given a portion. The true expectation of all who are blessed of Him is that they will be allotted a place or given a portion upon the earth. True, the portion, the place, and the privileges of those who are blessed of Him will vary greatly. This will depend upon callings and rewards, and we can rest assured that no company will exceed in glory or in exaltation the portion of those who are believing now. Nevertheless, no matter how exalted or great may be our blessing, it will still be upon the earth.

Confirmed by Christ.

In the truth declared in Psalm 37 were the final words as to man's future home they would still be enough. But these words are not the final words. Almost a thousand years after David gave this revelation, our Lord spoke again concerning this matter. However, His words do not cancel the words of David. They repeat and confirm what He said:

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Matthew 5:5.

These simple words of Christ stand today as His final declaration as to the future home of the redeemed. Therefore, unless it can be shown that at some later time someone speaking by inspiration of God brought forth later revelations which cancel this declaration, it must stand as God's final word on the subject. If any believe that there are such passages in the writings of any later witness such as Peter, James, John, or Paul, then let them come forth with the references that will sustain their position.

John 14:1-4

The familiar words of Christ as set forth in John 14:1-4 have been brought forth by many as proof of a heavenly destiny. This is to be expected since many are not able to distinguish between this portion of the Word of God and the funeral sermons they have heard which have been supposedly based upon it. Few there are who know the simple facts of this message. These words were spoken to eleven of our Lord's disciples, Judas having already gone out. These are the very men of whom it has been said they will sit on individual thrones judging the tribes of Israel. These thrones cannot be in heaven, they must be upon the earth. How could it be possible that He tells them here that they are to be in heaven when on this very same night He told them: "And I appoint unto you a kingdom as My Father hath appointed unto Me; that ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:29, 30).

As A. E. Knoch says, himself a firm believer that our future home is in heaven:

The temple in Jerusalem was the Father's house. In the walls were many abodes for the priests and Levites who officiated in its precincts. There is no hint anywhere in the Scriptures that the disciples go to heaven. A celestial destiny was not revealed until the apostle Paul was in his Roman prison. Then he first made it known in his Ephesian epistle.

With the first part of the above statement I fully agree, but not with the last part. I find numerous statements like this which make the claim that Paul reveals "a celestial destiny" in his Ephesian

epistle for the present day believer. This oft repeated statement is thrown out as if it were so obviously true that it needs no proof or demonstration. I suppose that many are taken in by this fallacy, but I am not. The ignorance concerning this epistle is so great that all anyone needs to do is make a statement, declare that it is taught in Ephesians, and very few indeed will have the knowledge that makes it possible for them to honestly accept or honestly challenge the references which are offered as proof. The following statement, concerning another matter, is an example of this:

Before the death of Christ all the dead went to hades, which was then a place of two compartments. At the time of His ascension He emptied the paradise section of hades and took all who were there to heaven, as Ephesians 4:8-10 so clearly teaches.

Those who make statements like this must know that the average reader will never bother to check up on a reference cited as proof. Furthermore, they know that even if the passage is quoted the reader will find it to be so obscure that he will have no way of knowing whether it does say such things or not. This is an ancient fallacy by which an obscure text is cited as proof, but the proof consists of nothing more than reading the idea into the passage.

I claim no superior understanding of Ephesians, but I have been reading, studying, interpreting, and teaching this epistle for almost forty years. In this time I have examined every word in it in the Greek, and have made my own translation in order to better comprehend the flow of its message. I do not, therefore, hesitate to state that Ephesians 4:8-10 contains no such ideas as the writer quoted above insists, and I further declare that there is not a single passage in Ephesians which when correctly translated and honestly interpreted gives any testimony that in any manner changes or cancels the witness of both David and Christ that they that are blessed of Him shall inherit the earth. In fact, by inference, Paul reiterates this testimony when he warned those to whom the Ephesian epistle was written:

For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Ephesians 5:5.

Paul would have made no such statement as this if the inheritance of those to whom he writes were not the kingdom of Christ, even the kingdom of God. This "kingdom of Christ" Paul speaks of here is identical with "my kingdom" spoken of in Luke 22:30, John 18:36.

Ephesians 1:3

The usual passage put forth in proof of the idea that Ephesians sets forth a celestial destiny for the present day believer is Ephesians 1:3. In the *King James Version* this reads:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

I am somewhat disappointed at the complete unwillingness of those who claim to be assiduous Bible students to take a long and honest look at this passage. Trite little interpretations which someone chanced upon many years ago are still set forth as being the very fullness of truth revealed in it. This verse forms the introductory words to the longest single sentence in the New Testament, and if we fail to truly understand the beginning of a sentence, the rest of it will be hopelessly confused.

I fell in love with this passage many years ago and I have never ceased to study it since that time.

My desire has ever been to know exactly what Paul said here, then to know what he meant by what he said. This does not seem to be the goal of some. I am grieved when I find this passage being used as a buttress to support ideas that cannot be found in it. Such terms as "blessing", "spiritual" and "heavenly places" are bandied about, but no investigation is made to find what these words mean and what they actually tell us in the context in which they are found. They are accepted as meaning whatever they seem to indicate according to the popular and shallow use made of them. Great dependence is placed upon the traditional and religious meanings of the words *spiritual* and *blessing*, but I find no attempts being made to get at the real meaning of these words according to their divine usage. Tradition has spoiled the meaning of these words, and we will corrupt our own thinking if we give these words their religious meanings rather than the Biblical.

The reader will have noted that three closely related words are found in this passage - *bless*, *blessed* and *blessing*. If these words are not important then the whole passage is unimportant and God's words are of no value. However, these words are of the utmost importance, but the constant ritualistic and liturgical use of the English words *bless*, *blessed*, and *blessing* has destroyed their value so far as being symbols that can be used to express the ideas that the Spirit of God intended to convey here. I have asked many what the words "Blessed be God" means to them and have never received a satisfactory answer. Let the reader ask himself what he means when he uses this phrase and what it means to him when he hears it.

If it is true that "without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better" (Heb. 7:7) it would seem out of place for men to "bless God."

This difficulty is further compounded by the fact that the words *bless* and *blessed* are constantly used to translate an entirely different Greek word. The following list will show this.

Makarizo, occurs 2 times; translated "call blessed" (1); "count happy" (1).

Makarios, occurs 50 times; translated "blessed" (44); "happy" (5); "happier" (1).

Makarismos, occurs 3 times; translated "blessedness" (3).

Eulogeo, occurs 44 times; translated "bless" (43); praise (1).

Eulogetos, occurs 8 times; translated "blessed" (8).

Eulogia, occurs 16 times; translated "blessing" (1); "bounty" (2); "bountifully" (2) fair speech (1).

These two words, *makarios* and *eulogetos*, are neither synonymous nor analogous. They are entirely different words with diverse meanings, yet they are translated almost uniformly by the same English word throughout the New Testament.

It is the last three words listed above that are found in Ephesians 1:3. Thus the question that needs to be answered is - What does the verb *eulogeo* mean, and what does the word *bless* mean when it is used to translate this word?

The roots used to make up *eulogeo* give us the best clue to its true meaning. It is formed of *eu* which means good or well, and *lego* which means so speak. When put together these words mean to speak well of; to praise or extol the excellence of; to exalt, that is, to elevate by praise.

That *eulogeo* means "to speak well of" is a fact that is witnessed to by every lexicographer who has dealt with this word. Our English word *eulogize* is derived from it and has exactly the same meaning.

Note these definitions.

Eulogeo, to speak well of, praise. *Manual Greek Lexicon, Abbott-Smith.*

Eulogize, to speak or write in strong commendation of, to extol in speech or writing; to praise. *Webster's New International Dictionary.*

Bless, to praise or glorify, to exalt for excellence. *Web. New Int.*

It seems that there are very few who recognize that the English word *bless* has the meaning quoted above. In fact they actually do not know what it means when they try to define it. This is why Scripture often means very little to them. Think how much more Psalm 103:1, 2 means when we read it in the light of the above definition of the word *bless*.

Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.

With this definition in mind the student will find much joy in tracing out the occurrences of *eulogeo eulogetos*, and *eulogia* as set forth on page 324 of the *Englishman's Greek Concordance*. By using such words as speak well of, extol, exalt, and acclaim he can cause each passage to shine with a new light. The basic idea in each one of these words is that of lifting up or raising up, and this idea is also basic in all forms of *eulogeo*. Exaltation is inherent in this word.

I have used the various forms of the word *acclaim* in translating Ephesians 1:3. This gives us:

Acclaimed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who acclaims us in every spiritual acclamation among the mighty ones in Christ.

I feel that this is an honest rendering of Ephesians 1:3; however, as I am the most severe critic of my own translations, I now feel this can be improved. Additional light gained from two years more of study has caused me to understand this passage more clearly. There is a matter in this passage which up until recent months I had missed. This is that the words *epouraniois* and *eulogetos* are analogous words, so much so that they could be classed as near synonyms.

Heaven

Once again I have made a complete new study of the Hebrew word that means *heavens* (*shamayim*), the Greek word that means *heaven* (*ouranos*), also the English word *heaven* itself. This is a study which I have made many times in the past twenty-five years as I am constantly hoping to turn up some new fact that will open up more truth in regard to these three words. I am not yet satisfied with the results of my study, as it seems to me there is always more beyond, nevertheless, I would like to set forth a few things which I believe will be of help to other students.

I have found that scholars have various opinions as to the derivation of the Greek word *ouranos*, especially as to the first part (*our*). Some think this is derived from the word *oms* which means to rise or to rear, in the sense that a mountain or hill lifts itself above the plain. Others believe that it derives from *horaa* which means "to see". Having considered carefully these ideas it is my conviction that the *our* element in *ouranos* comes from the verb *ora* which means to raise, and from this comes the word *oros* which means a mountain or hill. This derivation is parallel with and can be illustrated by our word *elevate*, which means to lift up or raise, and from which comes the word *elevation*, a term which is often used of a hill or mountain. In fact *ora* could literally be translated *elevate*, and *oros* could be translated *elevation*. This would make the word more flexible and not

always force upon us the idea of an actual mountain, unless the context made it plain that a mountain is meant.

When *oros* is combined with *ano* (meaning above, or up) we get the idea of raised above or raised up. Thus the basic idea in the word *ouranos* as seen in both of its elements is that of elevation or exaltation. This word can be used of beings, persons, places, or things. It can be further intensified by addition of the prefix *epi*, and this results in *epouranios*, a word which can only be understood by also seeing in it the idea of elevation or exaltation.

In the Hebrew word *shamayim*, the root according to Strong means "to be lofty." Young says it means "heaved up things", and Girdlestone says that the original idea represented by the root is generally considered to be height. Thus in this word we also have the basic idea of elevation or exaltation.

The English word *heaven* also signifies that which is heaved or lifted up. Some deny that *heaven* is the contract form of *heavedone*, but the evidence is strong that this may be the case. I am inclined to think that the word *heaven* may have come from the old past perfect form of *heave* (heave, heaved, hoven). However, that the word *heaven* has to do with that which is heaved, lifted up, or exalted cannot be doubted.

In spite of the various opinions in regard to these three words (*shamayim*, *ouranos*, and *heaven*) when all the evidence is weighed it leads to one conclusion - all three have to do with that which is above, that which is lifted up, that which is elevated, that which is exalted. The Scripture gives witness to this by declaring, "the heaven for height, and the earth for depth" (Prov. 25:3). This is the basic idea that must be recognized and firmly held if we ever expect to understand the multifarious uses of these words in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the English language.

With these facts before us, let us return to our consideration of Ephesians 1:3. As we have already noted there are four important words in this passage, all of which have to do with exaltation. These words are *eulogetos*, *eulogeo*, and *epouranios*. The relationship of the first three is quite evident, but we must not miss seeing the relationship of *epouranios* to them. Here we have a threefold repetition of words, but more important there is a fourfold repetition of the same thought or idea. This can be seen in the following translation.

Exalted is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ,Who exalts us with every spiritual exaltation among the most exalted in Christ.

Inasmuch as "to acclaim" can be only by words spoken or written, but "to exalt" can be something done by either words or by acts, this rendering sets forth the truth more accurately. Acclaim does not alter one's position, but exaltation can put one in a higher position. When we exalt God, we praise Him, speak well of Him. When He exalts us, He does us good. Our exaltation is in word. His exaltation of us is both in word and deed. We can confer upon Him no benefit. He can confer upon us every spiritual benefit. God first exalted Job by words (Job 1:8), then later He exalted him by deeds (Job 42:7-13). Since He exalts us with every spiritual exaltation, this will give us a place among the most exalted ones.

It is most interesting to note that *Ouranos* is used as a descriptive name of God (Matt. 21:25) and that *Bulogetos* is also one of His titles (Mark 14:61). This demonstrates further the analogous nature of these two words.

In previous studies I have translated *en tois epouraniois* by the phrase "among the mighty ones" (based upon Psalm 82:1), but I now feel "among the most exalted" better expresses the truth. I have also considered "among the eminently exalted." No matter how you translate it, it still does not tell us that our future home is in heaven. When Elizabeth said to Mary, "Exalted are you among women, and exalted is the fruit of your womb", no idea of destiny or place was intended. Even if women failed to exalt her, she would still be exalted among women. Her exaltation was from God. To be exalted among the most exalted requires that we be among them. When God sets up His kingdom, the most exalted ones will not be in heaven. Remember, there is to be a nobility in the kingdom of God.

Every Spiritual Exaltation

In all literary studies it is a well known fact that the opening words of a sentence (even the first word) sets the character for all that follows. To understand any involved sentence we must quickly find the word that sets the theme.

Ephesians 1:3 is said to be the longest sentence of connected discourse to be found in all literature. In it the idea of EXALTATION is the golden thread that runs all the way from the first word to the last. It opens with the word *exalted* and this idea permeates it all the way through. The opening words become a sort of introduction to all that follows. In these words Paul tell us:

Exalted is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Exalted are we by God. 1:3.

Exalted with every spiritual exaltation. 1:3.

Exalted among the most exalted ones. 1:3.

Without a break the sentence then goes on to give a list of these spiritual exaltations, these benefits conferred upon us by God speaking well of us.

Exalted by being chosen. He chooses us in Christ for Himself. 1:4.

Exalted by the time of our choice. We are chosen before He founds His order upon this earth. We are to fill a place in that order. 1:4.

Exalted by the character that will be ours. We are to be holy and flawless in His sight. 1:4.

Exalted by being designated beforehand. He has predetermined the place we are to fill. 1:5.

Exalted by the position that will be ours. We are to be among the sons of God. 1:5.

Exalted by the service we will perform. We are to extol the glory of His grace. 1: 6.

Exalted by being highly favored. Graced for the service we are to perform. He graces us in the beloved One. 1:6.

Exalted by our redemption. 1:7.

Exalted by the price of our redemption. It is through His blood. 1:7.

Exalted by the glory of His forgiveness. 1: 7.

Exalted by the ground of our forgiveness. It is according to the riches of His grace. 1:7.

Exalted by the superabundance of His grace. 1:8.

Exalted by the fact that He makes known to us the secret of His intention. 1:9.

Exalted because our lot is cast with Christ. 1:11.

Exalted by the purpose of our calling. 1:12.

Exalted by the gift of His Spirit. 1:13

Exalted by the redemption that is yet to be our portion. 1:14.

This list has been somewhat hurriedly worked out, but it will suffice to show the reader the golden thread of exaltation which is woven throughout this exceedingly long sentence. Furthermore, it will help us to understand better the meaning of "every spiritual exaltation" and to appreciate more what God has done and will yet do for us. How true it is that:

He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the rubbish heap, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them. 1 Samuel 2:8.

These are the truths that I find in Ephesians 1:3, but I do not find so much as even a hint that someday we are to leave this earth and go to heaven.

So, the challenge stands. If there are any plain passages that tell us our future home is in heaven, let them be brought forth.

The End.

The Interpretation of Matthew 24:34, 35

Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

This passage has always been a great burden to students of the Word of God. Opinions are widely divergent as to the meaning of the words "this generation."

Our word *generation* is very flexible and not easy to define. It is usually taken to mean the people living upon the earth at any one time. This has led many to think that our Lord declared that the people then living would remain alive until all the things set forth in Matthew 24 should come to pass. Those who accept this view usually make "all these things" to mean the destruction of Jerusalem in AD. 70. This is an impossible interpretation, which could be easily refuted even by those who hold it if they would set themselves to do so. The expression "all these things" must refer back to all that has been set forth. If we ask if these things took place in AD. 70, history will tell us that nothing like the things set forth took place at that time.

Some make the word *generation* (*genea*) to mean "race, kind, or family", and refer it to the Jewish people. And inasmuch as the Jewish people as a race or kind have not passed from the earthly scene, this seems an easy explanation of the difficulty this passage imposes. However, facts are stubborn things and the fact remains that the word *genea* is not once used in the sense of "race" or "kind" either in the New Testament, or in Classical Greek writers. Some say it is used this way one time (out of 184 occurrences) in the Septuagint, but this is open to question. I am of the opinion that this explanation is a forced one with no real authority to support it.

As stated before the English word *generation* is usually understood to mean all the people living upon the earth at one time, or else it is taken to mean a single step or stage in the succession of natural descent. Thinking in regard to this word has been very shallow, and the handling of it has been quite superficial. This word deserves to be studied, for it is quite evident that the word *generation* can be applied to anything that is generated. It is quite right to say that electricity is the

generation of a dynamo. And it is correct to call a dynamo a generator. But this is not the time or place to present a study of this word.

A careful study of the Greek word *genea* will bring the feeling that in some places it is used as a descriptive title to designate a segment or a portion of the Word of God. This is not strange since to generate is to produce, and the thing which is produced can be called a production or a generation. Since "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21), that which the Spirit generated or produced through them is rightfully referred to as a generation. It was in "many parts" (Heb. 1:1) that God spoke through the prophets, and each segment or portion is a generation. At last God spoke in His Son, and His words became a generation.

This meaning is seen in Ephesians 3:5 where the correct reading should be "which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men." Here we are told that the secret truth declared here by Paul was not made known in any other segment or portion of the Word.

In Colossians 1:26 we read of "the secret which has been concealed from the eons and from the generations." God gave much truth through angels and even more through holy men, but not one word they ever spoke gave any revelation concerning the secret truth spoken of here.

It is my feeling that this is also the meaning in Acts 8:33 where the question is asked, "Who shall declare His generation?" In answer to this we can now say in the words of the Psalmist: "The Lord gave the word; great was the company of those that published it." Psalm 68:11.

There are other passages where the word *genea* has this meaning. However, it must be noted that it has this meaning only when indicated by the context. The one place where beyond all question the word *generation* refers to a portion of the Word of God is the passage we are considering, Matthew 24:34, 35.

In these two verses a literary device is used wherein a thing said is repeated in different words for the purpose of interpreting and safeguarding that which has already been said. This device is used so as to make it impossible that the sense be missed. In the first statement our Lord said "this generation shall not pass", and in the second statement he declares "my words shall not pass away." This figure of speech is called *hermenia* or interpretation, and it is called this because after a statement is made the explanation follows immediately to make more clear what has been said less clearly.

In seeking to understand our Lord's statement here we need to remember that the long discourse recorded in Matthew 24 and 25 was spoken less than two days before His death, the shadow of which was then upon Him. He was, in the eyes of most men, only a simple uneducated peasant in Palestine, the son of a carpenter who had gathered a few odd disciples to himself. The only writing he ever did were a few words written in the dust and these were erased by being trampled under foot. A few treasured his words in their hearts, but no record was made of what he said. Under these conditions it would be quite logical to assume that once He was put to death, His words would soon be forgotten. Written words are more likely to endure, but spoken words are held only in the fallible memories of those who hear them.

This would seem to be the fate of the long message which began at Matthew 24:4. It carries such a wealth of exact detail that it would be impossible for anyone to correctly repeat it after he "had finished all these sayings". (Matt. 26:1). One would be right in assuming that under such circumstances this exact message would be lost to the world forever.

But this is not the way it is to be. Having reached the great climax of His discourse he pauses, before going on to add details, to boldly declare that "this generation", that is, the message of truth that God had produced by speaking through Him would not pass until all these things have been fulfilled. Then to avoid any mistake as to His meaning, He goes on to declare "My words shall not pass away."

I believe that this interpretation of Matthew 24:34, 35 will commend itself to all who love and seek for the truth.

The End.

DIVINE DECLARATIONS

In view of the bearing which Isaiah 26:10 has upon God's present method of dealing with mankind, every believer should make sure that this passage is imprinted upon his mind. If it is, it will influence our thinking and bring about a better understanding of the time in which we live and the conditions under which we live. In it we are told:

Let favor be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness.

The Hebrew word here for "favor" corresponds to the New Testament word for "grace." God's grace is always His love and favor shown to the undeserving. Since it speaks here of showing favor to the wicked, this is grace in the noblest meaning of that term.

From one simple statement in Ephesians 3:1, 2 we learn that God's present administration is one of grace. By *administration* I mean *dispensation*, and by *dispensation* I mean a method, manner, or mode of dealing. I use these terms in order to reveal my thoughts, not to conceal them. I have no sympathy with those teachers who use the word *dispensation* as if there were some great mystery in it which is known only to a few who have been initiated. The Greek word is *oikonomia*, from which we get such words as *economy* and *economics*. Both of these words have to do with administration and management. In its earliest use it had to do with the administration of a house, but by New Testament times it had taken on a much wider meaning. Basing their arguments upon this early meaning, and confusing a house with a family, there are some who insist that a dispensation must be limited to God's dealing with His own children. The word *oikia* occurs 95 times in the New Testament and *Gikas* is found 114 times, but not once in any of these occurrences is a family indicated. Why then should anyone try to limit *oikonomia* to a family simply because the root *Gikas* forms the first part of it. In Romans 16:23 we read of "Erastus the *oikonomos* of the city", and this is sufficient, for all who allow the Word of God to settle a matter, to show that an administration is not limited to a family or to a household.

That God's present method of dealing with the whole of mankind is entirely gracious is a truth declared by Paul, and it is witnessed to and demonstrated by all human experience. It is my firm conviction that this method of dealing began at Acts 28:28, since it is quite evident that absolute grace was not God's sole method of dealing with men during the Acts period. No believer in Christ during that time had any assurance that God would deal with him in grace, as I Cor. 11:30 clearly shows, and a man out of Christ never knew when the sword of God's wrath might fall. See Acts 12:23 for an example of this.

Today the believer can know with assurance that God's usual method of dealing with him will be to show him love and favor which he does not deserve, and while the man out of Christ may not know this, it still is true that this same method of dealing will be God's attitude toward him.

Many there are who like to believe that we live in a time when every transgression and disobedience receives a just recompense of reward. Some try to prove this to themselves by watching the lives of certain sinners for illness, accidents, and tragedies, then point to these as divine wrath against sin. However, such things as these are the portion of all men, and they are not divine retribution for sins committed. In this dispensation God may heal a man of illness but He will not lay this upon anyone. God's present administration is not one of divine justice, it is entirely gracious.

From the moment of Paul's great pronouncement God's method of dealing with mankind has been solely by grace. There are times when He has been passively gracious, and there are times when He has been actively gracious, but ever since the close of the Acts period if He could not act in grace then He has not acted at all.

There are some who object to the idea of God being passively gracious, insisting that grace is like love, which must be actively expressed if it is expressed at all. But this is unsound reasoning.

Both love and grace flow out of the character of God and they are expressions of what He is. He loves because He is love, and He is gracious because He is gracious. Love must be active and can only be actively expressed, but grace can be either active or passive.

A clear example of passive grace is seen in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, when men mocked Him, forced a crown of thorns upon His head, and even spit in His face. Such actions deserved to be punished, but He did nothing about it. As Peter says: "Who when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not" (I Peter 2:33). It would have been an example of punishment richly deserved if He had beckoned to the Father and called for the twelve legions of angels who were waiting for His command (Matt. 26:53), but He made no move. Thus He provided us with a classic example of passive grace such as men had never seen before. Later He provided the great example of active grace when He prayed for those who crucified Him, saying "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Luke 23:34.

From these examples we can see that when men fully deserve to be punished and nothing is done about it, this is passive grace. When men who deserve to be punished are forgiven, this is active grace. Today, God is being both actively and passively gracious, so that in every move He makes and in every work that He does He is gracious. Again I say, that if God cannot act in grace, then He will not act at all.

Some will say that this ties the hands of God, and permits Him no freedom of action. This is true, but it needs to be remembered that it is God who has tied His own hands and limited His own actions. To some, this is unthinkable, but they err because they know not the Scriptures. After the great flood of Noah's time God tied His hands and limited His actions by a promise never again to destroy all flesh by means of a flood. Thus the earth is fully secure against the threat of universal destruction by means of water. Thus, one answer to the childish question "Is there anything God cannot do?" one answer would be, "Yes, He cannot destroy the earth with a flood."

A sovereign can always limit his actions. In the United States where the sovereignty belongs to the people we have limited our power to act by the Constitution of the United States. In this we have

declared, "Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted" (Article VII). A statement like this ties our hands and we must abide by it. There are times when after an exceedingly vile crime has been committed that men speak out in anger calling for some cruel and unusual punishment to be inflicted upon the one who did it. But this cannot be since our constitution forbids it, and by this our hands are tied.

Inasmuch as all judicial acts of our Federal Government are matters of public record it would be possible for men to make a search of the archives, examine the record of every punishment inflicted since 1776 to see if this high principle has ever been ignored and violated. Such research would bring forth the fact that in one case a Federal judge violated this principle and inflicted a cruel and unusual punishment. In fact, there is actually a monument which memorializes this fact.

In Muskegon, Michigan, just inside the entrance to Evergreen Cemetery stands a monument the United States would prefer never had been erected. It recalls one of the darkest blots on the record of American history.

In 1835 Captain Jonathan Walker, together with Benjamin Lundy, a northern journalist and one of the first crusaders against slavery, joined forces to assist escaped slaves to join the colonization of Mexico or to settle in other countries. They carried this on successfully for nine years until in 1844, in route from Florida to the Bahamas with seven escaped slaves aboard, Captain Walker became seriously ill and the ship drifted helplessly until overtaken by a government steamer. Captain Walker was taken aboard to be returned to Florida.

Resentment had been built up over the years against Captain Walker and his program of freeing slaves. A lynch party gathered at Pensacola where he was to land, but the officers of the ship safely escorted him to jail. He was tried in the United States Court, and it was clear that he was violating the law of the land at that time. He was sentenced by the U.S. district judge to pay a heavy fine, to serve a year in jail. Neither of these could be classed as "cruel and unusual", but in addition to this the judge ordered that he be pilloried in the public square and have his right hand branded with "S S", so that all might know he was a "slave stealer." This made a glaring blemish on the records of a nation that has been surprisingly free from such injustices, and this one act performed in anger spoils the complete record so far as our government never inflicting a cruel or unusual punishment.

This illustrates, by way of contrast, God's present administration of grace. God did not need to do so, but when He announced through Paul, His apostle, that His method of dealing would be gracious, He bound Himself to act in no other manner until such time as He publicly signifies that this method of dealing is at an end. It is not possible for us to review the acts of God during the past 1900 years - no, not even possible for us to review His acts of this day - since His present method of dealing is secret and all His marvelous riches given to us in Christ are untraceable. God never works openly, as He did in the Acts period. This is seldom recognized truth declared in Ephesians 3:8, 9 where Paul speaks of "untraceable riches" and "the secret administration." All we know about it is that it is gracious and that all operations of God are now in secret.

Thus we are not able today to trace out and discover the works, the ways, and the riches of God in Christ toward us, but if we could we would find that every detail of divine activity has been love and favor to the undeserving. I do not believe that in the past 1900 years God has been angry with anyone. This statement is made with the facts of Psalm 7:11 clearly in mind. There we are told: "God is angry with the wicked every day." Anger is not God's attitude or feeling toward the wicked today. His attitude is one of grace.

Many men who claim to plead God's cause present Him as a somewhat angry gorilla which men have tortured into a frenzy of rage and who someday in great anger will force apart the bars of his cage and tear to pieces those who have tormented him. This may seem to be exaggerated, but it is certainly the picture which many present of God's attitude toward men at the present time. The picture is entirely false. In 1900 years no man has been able to make God angry. No one has been able to do anything that would cause Him to strike out in wrath. He is just as kind, just as gracious as He was 1900 years ago when this dispensation began.

It is good to know that the time will come when that which is now untraceable will be open and manifest; that all that God has done in secret will no longer be hidden but can be searched out and made known for His glory. I believe that this will be part of the work of those who are to be especially His "for the extolling of the glory of His grace," that very grace which operated secretly for so many centuries after the salvation of God was sent to the nations.

In that day when the untraceable becomes traceable and the secret workings of God become known, we shall discover that every work of God under this administration was an act of favor to the undeserving, that He ever acted in grace, and if He could not act in grace, then He did not act at all.

However, 1900 years of grace has not produced righteousness in the human race. This is not God's purpose in His present display of grace. Seven hundred and fifty years before God announced through Paul that His method of dealing is to be gracious that He declared through Isaiah that if grace is shown to the wicked they will not learn righteousness from it. This makes it evident that God's purpose in this administration of grace is not to produce a righteous world in which men will live at peace one with another. If this were His purpose He would not be dispensing grace. God's present purpose is to write into the history of His long dealings with man a complete record of the grace that is inherent in His character. At the present time God's grace is being demonstrated. This is being done by means of an administration of grace. Apart from His present full display of grace, man would never know just how gracious He is, therefore, man would never truly know God. The record He is now writing by His attitude and His acts is not to reveal "the judge of all the earth." It is to make known "the God of every grace."

The record that God is now writing in secret by works that are untraceable will yet be examined and studied by men of God in that coming day when the purpose of God will be to make Himself fully known to men.

THE EDITOR TO HIS FRIENDS

****Once again we have made the long trip from ocean to ocean in connection with the Fall Bible Conference Tour. This is six thousand miles as the crow flies, but since we do not fly as crows, we traveled ten thousand miles. We ministered the Word to fifteen groups in as many cities in the eleven weeks between August 25 and November 11, and were well satisfied with the reception of the teaching ministry in each place. It is always amazing to us that a work such as this is possible. As a rule, all we do is secure a meeting place, notify our friends in that place, they invite others, and the result is that there are always enough present for a good class and sufficient material support to cover all expenses. Three people definitely interested in the Word of God are enough to make a good class, although we have never taught as few as this. Each trip is filled with experiences that bring us

much joy, and this was true many times on this tour. The outstanding event of this trip was a gathering held in Rockford, Illinois which came as a complete surprise to us. This celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of my ministry among the friends there. Over seventy friends from the Northern Illinois and Southern Wisconsin area sat down to a very pleasant dinner, following which many words of praise and appreciation were spoken of the ministry. A monetary gift of good size was presented to us along with an inscribed testimonial plaque. This brought us much joy, and it now hangs in a prominent place in our study. With deep appreciation on our part and with pardonable pride we will try to reproduce it here.

**"Moreover, it is required in stewards
that a man be found faithful"**

1 Cor. 4:2

Presented

as a token of appreciation to

Otis Q. Sellers

For Faithfulness

at a gathering of his brethren in Christ
in Rockford, Saturday evening, September 12, 1959

by those friends present and with the love and
interest of many not present while celebrating the

Twenty-Fifth Anniversary

of the beginning of his Bible teaching ministry
in the Rockford and Chicago areas and witnessing
to his labors thru these years

"in the Word of Truth"

2 Cor. 6:1-10

Thy words were found, and I did eat them;
and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart"

Jer. 15:16

"When thou goest, it shall lead thee;
When thou sleepest, it shall keep thee;
And when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee."

Prov. 6:22

****These lines are being penned on the day before 1959 draws to a close. It has been a year of special meaning to me as it marked several milestones in my life. It was just forty years ago that God moved in relationship to my life. I did not understand His work then and I do not fully understand it now, but I do know that He moved in relationship to my life to make Himself a part of it. This was a gracious work upon His part and I could have resisted His grace, but I did not. Today, forty years later I am glad that I did not slam the door in His face. I was submissive, and His work in my behalf linked up with my submission to it resulted in me becoming a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. To believe God is now a definite part of my character. For forty years I have been believing, so I know what it is to continue in the faith. Upon believing I immediately became a student of God's Word in order to find more about Christ. "That I may know Him" has ever been the purpose of all my studies.

The exaltation of Christ has been the goal of my ministry. For fifteen years I studied the Word and did my best to teach it to others. As a result I discovered much truth for myself, and each truth discovered seemed to point to more truth beyond, but I found I was involved in so many ways that I had to pay a price for every truth I discovered and tried to set forth. At last I determined to sever and to separate myself from every possible hindrance that stood between me and my personal quest for God's truth. This was just twenty-five years ago, and from that day to this I have been free to study, free to believe, and free to declare the truth to all who will listen. I am not the hired servant of any man or any group of men. I am an independent student of the Word of God, coming to my own conclusions concerning each matter after weighing all the evidence in regard to it.

It needs to be said of the work which I do that it could hardly be done without the help of others. I am thankful, truly thankful, for those hundreds of men and women who through the past twenty-five years have supported me as a student and teacher. Teaching the Word requires extensive travel. Publishing the truth requires paying those who do the printing and supply the paper. The friends of this ministry have always been willing to make these things possible. I assure them that the years to come will be spent in the same perpetual and progressive study that has characterized the quarter-century that has passed. There is much light and truth yet to come forth from the Word.

****Apropos of that which is written above, I was somewhat surprised when I opened the Thanksgiving Day issue of *Life* magazine and noted the subject of its weekly editorial to be: "BESIDES OUR THANKS, WE OWE TO GOD A FURTHER QUEST FOR HIS TRUTH." I thought about this title for a good while before going on to read the article. I wanted to enjoy the exquisite truth of that sentence before reading on, knowing quite well that what followed would be a disappointment. It was. It had little to say about the quest for God's truth. No reference was made to the Bible in the entire editorial.

The quest for God's truth within the pages of His Word has been the supreme purpose of my life. And yet I still owe to God a further quest for His truth. This is a debt which I must always be paying, but it is one that can never be paid. As Bishop Butler said long ago in his Analogy: "And as it is owned the whole scheme of scripture is not yet understood; so if it ever comes to be understood, before the restitution of all things, and without miraculous interpositions; it must be in the same way as natural knowledge is come at: by the continuance and progress of learning and of liberty; and by particular persons attending to, comparing and pursuing, intimations scattered up and down it, which are overlooked and disregarded by the generality of the world. For this is the way, in which all improvements are made; by thoughtful men tracing on obscure hints, as it were, dropped us by nature accidentally, or which seem to come into our minds by chance. Nor is it at all incredible, that a book, which has been so long in the possession of mankind, should contain many truths as yet undiscovered."

It should be recognized that there will be no applause today for those who make a renewed quest for the truth within the pages of God's book. A man will be accused of arrogance for even suggesting that fresh and new truth can be produced through the honest study of the Word of God.

Today men prefer to believe that which has the support of custom, authority, sentiment, traditions, and numbers. If a careful student should come up with anything that differs with established opinions he will find it derided as an "exegetical novelty." Even great discoveries of truth are dismissed with the statement that if it were true someone would have seen it before. Many seem to be guided by the principle that if they never heard of it, it is not true, and only that can be true which

men have seen before.

Up to the present time very little of true methods of study have been applied to the Scriptures. By this I mean that such things as the laws of logic, the principles of semantics, and the recognition of literary methods have been too little used by students of the Word. If any think otherwise, then let them explain how it is that in the interpretation of Scripture fables are treated as facts. By fable I mean a fictitious narrative used to illustrate some truth. Why is it that such literary devices as satire and irony are never recognized? Why is it that the meaning of God's words are seldom derived from the use God has made of them? Why is it that divine sentences are interpreted with no recognition of subject or predicate?

Even among advanced dispensationalists much is made of the "joint-heirs, joint-body and joint-partakers" of Ephesians 3:9 but none so far have been willing to recognize that the subject of this statement is "the nations." Rather than face this fact many prefer to take refuge in the mistranslation "the Gentiles." A new day would begin with our Bibles if we examined each sentence to find its subject and then went on to find what the predicate says about the subject.

The one who has launched out upon the ocean of God's great Word is inclined to say in the words of Paul: "And for such a service as this who is competent" (2 Cor. 2:16, *Weymouth*). And Paul also supplies the words for our answer: "Not that of ourselves we are competent to decide anything by our own reasonings, but our competency comes from God." (2 Cor. 3:5 *Weymouth*).

****This issue of **THE WORD OF TRUTH** completes Volume Fifteen. The six issues which make up this volume will soon be bound and offered for sale at the price of \$2.00 per copy.

****Our next publication will be "Christian Individualism, A Way of Life for the Active Believer in Christ" A copy of this will be sent to each reader as soon as it comes from the press. Those who would like to share the cost of printing and distributing this pamphlet should send their gifts at once.

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