

Old Paths

Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. Jeremiah 6:16

The secret of the LORD is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant. Psalm 25:14

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Straight and Narrow

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The Law of Diminished Capacity

Bill & Dee Stringfellow

Through the years that we have been producing inspirational and instructional books and videos, we have had to deal with doctrines that have been deceptive, deadly, and dangerous to God's people preparing for Christ's soon return. In exposing these errors, sad to say, we have lost some folks we considered good friends. The chances of this happening again with the facts we plan to present in this paper are very high. We hate to lose those we love, but this is a subject that must be dealt with. Please, before reading any further, pray for God to reveal to you if this is truth.

The Law of Diminished Capacity has been one of Satan's greatest tools in his war against God and His Son. By looking at a few verses you will quickly grasp the meaning of the law. First, Isaiah 14:12-14; where you find Satan's sinful goals spelled out. "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High."

Inspiration tells us that Satan began his campaign against God by secretly discrediting God and His heavenly law to the angels. He was, in every sense of the word, putting God down. He even claimed that if he were in charge they would all have more freedom and joy.

In the third chapter of Genesis you find him discrediting God to the first humans. Since you know this story well, look at how he tried then: (Verse 1) "Yea,

hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Verse 4) "Ye shall not surely die!" Satan campaigned against God with humans through doubt and denial.

Two more examples and you will understand the Law of Diminished Capacity. John 3:30 quotes John the Baptist's statement about Jesus. He said, "He must increase, but I must decrease." When Satan decided to wage war with God and His Son he tried to increase his own standing by decreasing God's and Christ's capacity.

In the fourth chapter of Luke, when Satan tried to tempt Christ in the wilderness, he took Jesus up to a high mountain and gave Him a panoramic view of the world through all the ages. Then, in verses six and seven, he said, "All this power will I give Thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will give it. If Thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be Thine." Satan claimed he was higher and more powerful than Jesus. He was exalting himself while trying to belittle Christ. Now you understand the Law of Diminished Capacity, don't you?

In a recent newsletter from some precious, long-time friends, we were shocked to read how, without

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even being aware of it, they were actually diminishing God's capacity. As unbelievable as it was, they were doing the very same thing Lucifer has done through the years. Our hearts ached as we saw them describe creation week and how God put waters above the earth and below the earth. They said that when God withdrew His Spirit the balance of nature was upset and the waters came down and created the flood. It was all like some sort of accident the Lord couldn't prevent. Then, what they went on to say shook us to the depth of our souls. Just so there will be no mistakes, we quote them: "How could God say He would never send another flood? Was it because He just decided that He didn't want to use water to kill everyone the next time around? No, it was because the canopy of water that fell from the sky when the world's balance was disturbed back in Noah's day no longer is there. When God's Spirit is once again totally withdrawn from the earth, fire will destroy it."

Can you believe that? My Bible says that there is nothing too hard for God. He is the Creator. He put the waters there in the first place, and if He wanted water there again, surely He could put it back up there in a split second! Bless their hearts. These otherwise sane and sensible Bible believers don't realize they just diminished God's capacity.

As you know, God also caused the waters deep down in the earth to burst forth to help create the flood. (Genesis 7:11) Don't overlook the fact that this was a well-planned program. In Genesis 7:4, the Lord told Noah exactly when He was going to bring the rain, and for how long: "For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights . . ." Then the Bible goes on to explain that it all took place exactly as, and when, the Lord said! Our Heavenly Father was in charge then, and He is still in charge today! God's ways are high.

God's Ways Are High

For nearly 6,000 years Satan has come up with almost every conceivable falsehood to lower humans' estimation of God's power, love and care for them, even the lie that "God is dead." That is about as diminished as you can get, isn't it? But, one of the most dangerous deceptions is fooling some of God's finest children today. Before you examine it, please do an important Bible word study. Isaiah 55:8-9 quotes God's actual words: "For My thoughts are not your

thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

In Hebrew, the word "ways" means "manners, behaviors, customs and actions." The word "thoughts" means "ideals, purposes, intentions and meditations." Then the word "higher" means "elevated, exalted and purer." Therefore, God is actually saying, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My manners, behaviors, customs and actions more elevated, exalted and purer than yours and My ideals, purposes, intentions and meditations than yours."

Do you realize the deep significance of what God is saying? This hit us like a ton of bricks! Before we make this startling statement, let us say that we have Biblical proof to back it up. Here is that statement that you, too, might not have ever considered before: Your Heavenly Father is so exalted, so pure and so elevated that He is in reality above the Ten Commandments He gave to human beings for human beings! It is a known fact that the Ten Commandments for humans are a transcript of God's character, but the mistake most people make is that God is restricted to those ten precepts when He operates on that higher, exalted and purer plain. That isn't Biblical.

The Apostle Paul was aware of these facts when he wrote in 1 Timothy 1:9: "Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man." Surely then, the law wasn't made for God, the Creator. God's own code of morals far exceeds the ones He gave humans. In Ecclesiastes 5:8, Solomon says God is "higher than the highest." HE IS SOVEREIGN.

God can do anything and everything except sin. To put Him where He can't work out His sovereign will is 100% error. Example: Exodus 20:3-17, which lists those ten human commandments, can't possibly apply to God. God can have no other gods before Him. He wouldn't make any graven images or bow down to them. He wouldn't take His own name in vain. He has no father and mother to honor. He surely wouldn't commit adultery, steal, bear false witness against His neighbor, nor covet.

When He told humans to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, how many days did He say humans were to work? Sure, six. And then on the seventh day

they were to do how much work? Not any! Does that apply to your Heavenly Father? His own Son said no. In the fifth chapter of John the Jews tried to kill Him because of His Sabbath activities. In verse 17 you read: “But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto and I work.” If God were down on the human level, then for more than three hundred thousand weeks God seems to have gone contrary to His own character. Think of the disasters that would have happened if God stopped all His work on the Sabbath. Chaos would be worldwide. Prayers wouldn’t be heard or answered and His loving protection would be gone. The list could go on and on. As a matter of fact, you and I wouldn’t even be here.

Misconceptions About God’s Character

All this has been leading up to the false teaching that God does not kill because the law is the transcript of His character, and He wouldn’t give us a law He would break. We could stop right here with what we have seen thus far, and recognize that this is an untrue doctrine. It is another of Satan’s attempts to diminish God’s capacity. But because some dear children of God have been caught up in this, we must examine some crucial facts. First, look at Deuteronomy 32:39 where God once again is quoted, “See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god with Me; I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of My hand.”

Those folks who believe that God does not kill find this to be a contradiction. When you examine the word “kill” here and the word “kill” in Exodus 20:13 it becomes apparent as the nose on your face. In Exodus 20:13, the word “kill” in its original Hebrew means “Spontaneous premeditated murder with intense anger.” The word “kill” in Deuteronomy 32:39 in Hebrew means “to cause life to cease.” God says that humans have no right to commit murder, while He, as Creator, cannot only create life but cause life to cease. It is His prerogative, option, decision and determination. After all, He is still the Supreme Ruler.

Another misconception about God’s character is cleared up in the book of Ezekiel in the 33rd chapter and verse 11. Once again God speaks and says, “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live.” This untrue teaching that God does not

destroy tries to impress on the human mind that when God kills He is “a vengeful God, full of anger and wrath.” You just read where God hates to see anyone’s life cease, and the Bible says over and over again that God’s utmost desire is that all humans are saved. For centuries and centuries Satan has tried to get humans to accept a falsehood by first presenting another false concept that is supposed to be a fact. He has done it here in the “God does not kill” concept by stating as a fact that to kill is to be vengeful. That’s as wrong as wrong can be. For humans to kill is vengeful, but God does not work on this lower premise, does He? In Ephesians 4:26, we are told to: “Be ye angry, and sin not.” Since this is possible for humans, doesn’t it make sense that it would be easier for God? Just for the record, the word “wrath” means “anger,” and the word “vengeance,” means “retribution.” The Bible says that God is the originator of the term and practice called “righteous indignation.” He doesn’t deal in hatred, revenge, envy or hostility known only to sinful human beings. Satan does an outstanding job of diminishing God’s supreme power, total control and loving character with those who accept this deception.

Those who teach that Satan is the one who does the actual killing falsely rationalize many scriptures and omit a great number of solid texts that must be considered. By now the truth ought to be evident. For example, 2 Samuel 24:1 says “And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.” In 1 Chronicles 21:1, you read, “And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.” God has used fire, hail stones, lightning, thunder, snakes, water, dreams, visions, leprosy, armies, drought, earthquakes and even repentant blind Samson to name a few. Tell us then, why can’t He use Satan? In that special end-time book, *The Great Controversy*, we find this statement:

“A single angel destroyed all the first-born of the Egyptians and filled the land with mourning. When David offended against God by numbering the people, one angel caused that terrible destruction by which his sin was punished. The same destructive power exercised by holy angels when God commands, will be exercised by evil angels when He permits.” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 614)

So then, who is truly responsible for death and destruction? Ironically, one of the clear and concise answers is found in the very same text these dear friends quoted in their newsletter to try to support their misconception. It is Romans 1:18, 24, 26, and 28. It is tragic that they missed the whole point. Verse 18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness"; Verse 24, "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves"; Verse 26, "For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature"; Verse 28, "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient."

All through the writings of the proponents of this doctrinal error it is stated that death comes as a result of humans grieving away the Spirit of God. They say that, in essence, humans destroy themselves. Yes, humans do bring on their own demise, but it is still God who does the destroying. In those verses that we just quoted the most significant statements are overlooked. Look again and you will read, "GOD also gave them up"; "GOD gave them up"; "GOD gave them over." Any way you cut it, it is still our Heavenly Father, the Sovereign God, who does it all.

In that incomparable book about the life of our Saviour, *The Desire of Ages*, the inspired author also understood this law Lucifer has been perverting. On page 493 you read, "There are Christians who think and speak altogether too much about the power of Satan. They think of their adversary, they pray about him, and he looms up greater and greater in their imagination. It is true that he is a powerful being; but thank God we have a mighty Saviour Who cast out the evil one from Heaven. Satan is pleased when we mag-

nify his power. Why not talk of Jesus? Why not magnify His power."

God is not diminished, and one day very soon everything He has ever done will be shown to be fair, just, loving and supremely patient. As a matter of fact, God's own Word says just that.

In the 15th chapter of Revelation, verses 2-4 you read: "And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire; and them that had gotten the victory over the beast and over his image, and over his mark, and over

the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; JUST and TRUE are Thy WAYS thou King of saints. Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? for Thou only art holy; for all nations shall come and worship before Thee; for Thy JUDGMENTS are made MANIFEST." All of God's righteous acts will be made clear.

Harry Truman was the 33rd president of the United States and on his desk was a plaque that read, "The Buck Stops Here." Our Heavenly Father says the same thing and accepts full responsibility for all His "strange acts." (Isaiah 28:21)

Let's trust Him and exalt and elevate His character and capacity in all we do and say.



Bill & Dee Stringfellow

(The Stringfellows write from their home in Tennessee. Bill and Dee have produced an excellent set of video tapes on the three angels' messages entitled "All in The Name of The Lord." For information on these tapes you may write to them at: HC 69 Box 817, Spencer, TN 38585. Elder Stringfellow is at the present time facing the challenge of cancer. He and Dee would greatly appreciate your prayers for a swift and complete recovery as the Lord wills.)

The Higher Education

by Allen Stump

Jesus, the “faithful and true witness,” said, “this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:3) What do these words of Jesus mean? Ellen G. White wrote: “The highest education includes the knowledge of the word of God, and is comprehended in the words, ‘That they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou has sent.’ John 17:3.” (*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 45)

The issue of knowing God is important because it involves the gospel. It is not a doctrine that can be compartmentalized apart from salvation. Why is it “life eternal” to have a knowledge of God and Christ? Many people ask why I emphasize the truth about the nature of God so much. This study will seek to examine the importance of the truth about God and answer the following questions: Why does it really matter if we know the truth about God? What does knowing the truth about God do for us? What kind of change does it effect? How does the knowledge of God bring that change into our lives?

The Importance of Knowing God

Let us ever remember that “error is never harmless.” (*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 292) However, Jesus said, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:32) Truth sets the Christian free from the bondage of sin. Error binds one in chains of sin which lead to ruin.

While all error is harmful, error on foundational truths provides Satan his greatest opportunity to destroy mankind. Knowing foundational truths such as the nature of the Godhead provides the basis for eternal life. This is not just intellectual knowledge. The Bible instructs us: “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.” (James 2:19) Satan knows that the Father is “the only true God” and that Jesus is His “only begotten Son,” but there exists no sweet love in his heart for God. What we must have is the experiential knowledge that comes from abiding in Christ. In the book of Job we find these words: “Acquaint now thyself with

him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee.” (Job 22:21)

The Apostle Peter says: “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the *knowledge* of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through *the knowledge of him that hath called us* to glory and virtue.” (2 Peter 1:2-3) Here Peter says that “grace and peace” are multiplied to us through a “*knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.*” In fact, he is so bold as to say that “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” come through a proper knowledge of God.

Two Bible texts expand our comprehension of this theme. Under inspiration Jeremiah said: “Let him that glorieth glory in this, that he *understandeth and knoweth me*, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.” (Jeremiah 9:24) Writing in the New Testament, Paul noted, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” (Galatians 6:14)

Jeremiah says the one thing we can glory in comes from knowing God, especially in relationship to His character. Paul writes that he could glory only in the cross. Together these texts help us to see that the gospel is based on our knowing God and that the cross is the central focus revealing the true nature of God to us. If we do not understand the nature of the sacrifice that God made in giving up Jesus to die the death of the cross, then we have missed the heart of the gospel, the only thing in which Paul could glory.

God’s Great Love

Why is it “life eternal” to know the truth about God and why does knowing the truth set us free from sin? First we want to set the record straight. This is not a divine fiat of God. He is not capricious nor does He make decrees on whims or impulse. God always works out of principle. God is logical. He can give a reason for everything that He does, even that which seems most illogical to us, the sending of His only begotten Son to die for man. The logic and principle are founded in His great love for us.

How much does God really love you? Of course we all know the words of John 3:16, but have we thought

of what Jesus said in John 17:23? “I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and *hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.*” Jesus acknowledges that God loves us as He loves Jesus! This is perhaps one of the most difficult statements of Scripture to believe. I can understand how God could love Jesus: He always did the right things and always wanted to please His Father. (See John 8:29.)

We all know how easy it is to love sweet, kind, neat, polite, and respectful children and how hard it is to love harsh, rude, dirty, impolite, and disrespectful children. God’s love to us is so great that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) In other words, while we were harsh, rude, dirty, impolite, and disrespectful children to the point we would pull God from His throne and kill Him if we could, He still loves us as He loves the sweet, kind, neat, polite, and always respectful Jesus!

An Important Principle

There is an old saying, “By beholding we become changed.” While this is not a direct Bible quote, it is based on 2 Corinthians 3:18 which says: “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” In other words, we become changed into whatever we behold. If we look at sweet lovely things, we will become sweet and lovely. If we behold nasty, abominable things, that is the way we become. This is why God counsels us that “whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” (Philippians 4:8)

“Doctrine” is simply Bible teaching about God. Everything in the Bible is there for a reason, and that reason is to teach us something about God’s character. Our doctrine reflects our understanding of God and His character. Based on the principle of 2 Corinthians 3:18, we will become like the God we adore, worship, and venerate.

False views distort the character and nature of God. For instance, if I believe in an ever-burning, eternal hell, I may look upon God as unfair and unjust, I may

perceive God as cruel, revengeful, and cold-hearted. If I believe in predestination, then we may view God as whimsical, fickle, or capricious. I may have a difficult time realizing that God values me as a person. I may not be able to see that for just one soul, Christ would have died. The false view of the Godhead will prevent me from seeing God’s love to me personally in giving of His only begotten Son. These, and all other false concepts of God lead to a misunderstanding of His love.

Correct views about God will lead me to love and appreciate Him and desire to become like Him in character. Knowing the truth about hell helps me to realize that while God is just, He is also merciful. Knowing that I have free will helps me to see that my God values me as an individual person. Knowing the truth about God helps me to see God’s love in giving His only begotten Son to die for my sins. As someone once said, “From cover to cover the Bible is a revelation of the Father’s love.”

Our love to God will be in direct proportion to our understanding of His love. 1 John 4:19 says: “We love him, because he first loved us.” His love was demonstrated to us in Jesus. “But God commendeth [or demonstrated] his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8) “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. (1 John 4:9) “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.” (1 John 3:16)

The value of the Sacrifice tells us something not only of the nature of the broken law, but of the value that God placed upon those that were to be redeemed. “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” (1 Peter 1:18-19)

God’s Ultimate Desire

God’s ultimate desire for us is to become like Him in character. We are to become “perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect” and become a partaker of the “divine nature.” (Matthew 5:48; 2 Peter 1:4) When Jesus returns it will be for a church (His people)

that is without spot or wrinkle. (Ephesians 5:27) This character comes from knowing *and appreciating* God.

God's Character of Love Manifested in Giving

God's love is revealed in the Bible through the giving of His only begotten Son. Few texts speak to the heart as does John 3:16. "God so loved . . . that he gave." True love is *manifested* in giving. God gave, not lent, His only begotten Son to humanity. Jesus will for eternity have human flesh and carry the nail scars in His hands.

Calvary teaches us that true love is unselfish and is manifested in giving. The opposite of love is not hate, but rather selfishness! God's truth leads to sanctification or holiness because He is holy and longs for a happy, holy people. Therefore, God allows us to learn to give so as to become like Him in character.

It has been well written: "Continual giving starves covetousness to death." (*Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 348) While the context of the testimony is financial giving, there is a principle to be understood: giving not only money, but giving in general, has at its heart the concept of doing and providing for others instead of oneself. Truly the love of Christ will constrain us as nothing else can. (See 2 Corinthians 5:14.)

This love has led countless Christians to martyrdom. This love is the only motivation to truly serve and love God as He is worthy of being worshiped and loved. This is practical godliness. This is the motivation for all of the Christian life, to live for Him who died for me.

"In order to become like Him [God] and to reveal His character, we must know Him aright. We must know Him as He reveals Himself.

"A knowledge of God is the foundation of all true education and of all true service. It is the only real safeguard against temptation. It is this alone that can make us like God in character. (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 409)

"This knowledge is the essential preparation both for this life and for the life to come." (*Ibid.*) □□□

CAMP MEETING UPDATE

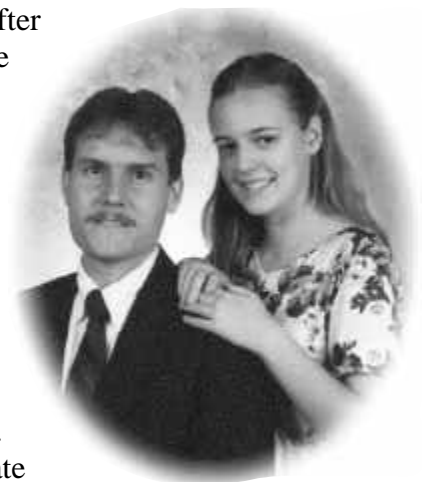
During the month of September there will be several weekend meetings with Brother David Clayton as the special speaker. Brother Clayton and part of his family will be visiting from their home in Jamaica. Some scheduled areas already include the following places and dates:

The East Tennessee Church (423) 623-0113 Sept. 5
The Arizona Camp Meeting (520) 442-9868 Sept. 9-12
The Cincinnati Church (513) 648-9428 Sept. 19
The Newark, Ohio Church (740) 763-2242 Sept. 23
The Smyrna Chapel in WV (304) 732-9204 Sept. 26
The New Burnside Church in IL (618) 996-3596 Oct. 3

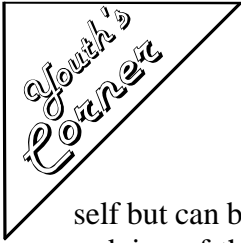
There will also be time for meetings in the middle of the week at other locations yet to be scheduled. Brother Randall Mercer will be escorting David to the various meetings. You may call Brother Mercer for details at (618) 996-3596.

Wedding Announcement

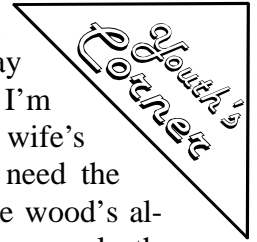
Smyrna Gospel Ministries wishes to join George and Esther McDainel in announcing the engagement and forthcoming marriage of their daughter Kendra Janelle to the assistant editor of *Old Paths*, Lynnford Beachy. The wedding will be held November 29, 1998 in Meridian, Mississippi. Lynnford and Kendra will be making their home in West Virginia after their wedding. We wish God's richest blessings upon them that this union will be a blessing for both of them, and also a blessing for all those whom they come in contact with. They will appreciate your prayers.



Lynnford & Kendra



When The Clock Struck Ten



A cup of water is not much in itself but can be as large as the mighty ocean to a man dying of thirst. A few candles can only produce a small amount of light for a very short time, but with a few pieces of fire-wood they were to one man a matter of life or death.

Before the New England area found electricity coming into its area, a certain precious mother and wife was dying. John had spent practically all of his time beside her bed. Too much time, it became apparent, when his daughter gave her alarming, before-breakfast announcement.

“Daddy, we don’t have enough wood to last through today and tonight. All we’ve got for candles are these three half-burned ones. How will we keep Mamma warm?”

“Yea, Pop,” Little John added, “how’ll we be able to see to take care of her?”

Without replying, he sat at his crude wooden dining table thinking about how he had lost his entire savings -the money he had set aside so that he wouldn’t have to work while his wife was dying—as well as what little he had in his checking account. He had always trusted his next door neighbor explicitly. So much of a friend was he that John did not even give it a second thought when he asked him to co-sign a note at the bank with him. He remembered that staggering statement of the banker, “John, I’m sorry, we’ll have to take your funds to pay off the note.”

The self-pity vanished the moment he heard his wife give out one of those painful coughs that were coming more and more frequently.

John rose from the table, smiled at his two bewildered and heavily burdened children, patted each of them on top of their head, and made his way slowly into his bedroom.

Just as John knelt down on the old rug his wife had made for him so he could have something warm to stand on when he got up in the morning to heat the house, the clock softly sounded ten notes.

“Lord God in heaven,” John said with tears making their way down his cheeks, you know what I’m faced with right now. My dear wife’s sick and soon to die. My kids need the warmth of the fireplace, too. The wood’s almost completely gone and there are only three little pieces of candles left. We do have a meal or two left in the cupboard. I’m thankful for what we do have, Lord, and I’m not complaining about the situation. ‘Cause it’s my own doings or lack of doings that’s the cause of it all. Please help me now to at least get these things we need so badly. Please help me to get them today.”

John remained on his knees after finishing praying. He was trying to think of where he could get some work for just that day. His mind pictured farmer after farmer and store after store. He thought of the mill, too. He believed that God would get the wood and candles for him by showing him where to work.

All that day he trudged through the few inches of snow that had gently fallen the night before. He went to every farmer he could find, walking miles between farm houses. But to no avail. All of them had more hands than they could use during the slack of winter.

The stores did not need any help, even for one day’s hard labor. Each and every place he went seeking help, he found sympathy but not work. John never told any of the people that he was completely broke. He just could not seem to bring himself to ask for wood or candles when he had no way of paying them back. Maybe his pride also had a little to do with his not letting anyone know that he was penniless.

When all hope seemed to be gone, John turned back towards home. He dreaded desperately telling the kids that he had failed. With his heart already half-broken with the burden of seeing his precious wife getting worse and worse with each passing day, he just did not know how he would face those trusting eyes of his innocent children. But he had to go home.

It looked like there was still more than an hour or an hour and a half of sunlight left in the skies as he made his way up the narrow path. Little John must have shoveled off the snow out to the front gate. His heavy heart ached as he got closer and closer to the gate. He was unable to hold up his head as he swung open the

old, rusty and noisy gate that signaled to his son and daughter that he had arrived.

When Little John darted out of the house, John looked up, hating to have to break the bad news to the energetic and enthusiastic lad. And as he looked up to face his son, he was dumbfounded to see that right in front of the porch was a huge pile of wood!

John was clapping his hands for joy as he shouted, "Pa, we've got the wood."

"And a big package of candles, too," his daughter exclaimed, jumping off the porch and running towards her dad.

Speechless and stunned, he just looked at the clean short logs stacked so neatly in a large pile. Finally, he was able to muster enough strength to ask, "Children, where did this come from?"

Before either of them could answer, he said, "This's a mistake. Somebody's made a big mistake."

"Oh, no, Pa," John said confidently, "nobody made a mistake. A man came to the house and knocked on the front door with the handle of his whip. When I opened it, he asked if you lived here. I told him that you sure did. Then he said, 'Here are some candles, and I've got a load of wood for him, too.'

"I asked him if you had sent them and he told me that he didn't think you knew anything about it. When I asked him who did send it, he said, 'Oh, I can't tell. But you tell your pa that they're a gift.'

After going into the house to check on his wife, he asked both of the little ones if they had ever seen the man before. Neither of them recognized him. All during their meager meal, the bewildered father did not say more than two or three words. He just could not figure out who had sent the supplies they needed so badly. He recalled all his words to the people he asked for work. He had not said anything to any of them of their desperation.

"Little John, you and your sister, please clean off the table and wash the dishes. I'm going to go back into town and see if I can find out who sent us the wood and candles. Look after your Mom, Okay?"

"Okay," they said in unison.

As John reached the door, he stopped, turned, and said, "You know, I never asked you what kind of a wagon the man had."

"It was a big one, Pa," Little John said, describing everything about it as a young boy would.

John knew right then and there whose wagon it was. "Son, that sounds like old Mr. Graff's wagon. There's not another one like it anywhere around here."

"But, Pa," his daughter said. "Mr. Graff makes and sells liquor!"

"Besides that," John said, "he doesn't like you, does he Pa?"

"Well," the father answered, "you know that I've been speaking to church groups and town hall meetings about the dangers of alcohol, don't you?"

Both children nodded in agreement.

"Since Mr. Graff makes the stuff, and since he sells quite a great deal of it to lots of folks all over the county, he would go out of business if everyone paid attention to the Temperance Society and quit drinking liquor."

"So he doesn't like you 'cause you could cause him to lose lots of money," John said.

"Yes, Son, I guess he hates me quite a lot. I've spoken to him every time I've seen him so he'd know that I've got no ill feelings towards him personally, but he won't even look at me, much less speak. You two watch after Momma. I won't be gone long."

It was somewhat of a surprise when Mr. Graff looked up and nodded when John entered his office in the rear of the distillery. For the first time in a long time, there did not seem to be any tension between the two of them.

"Mr. Graff," John said, "I want to ask you if you sent a load of wood and some candles out to my house today."

Before I answer," Graff said, "Tell me if they were needed or not."

“Oh they were needed, all right, they were surely needed,” John replied, trying to hold back the tears. “Did you send them?”

“Yes I did,” he answered as he pulled up a chair for John to sit in. “And I want to tell you why I sent those things. This morning as I was busy at work a voice seemed to say to me, ‘Send John the temperance man some wood.’ I couldn’t figure out that one, for sure, so I laughed at such a ridiculous thought and kept on working.

“A few minutes later, I got an impression that you needed wood badly. This impression created some real mixed emotions within me. First, I wondered if I was losing my mind by hearing things. And then, second, I thought that the last person in the world I’d send wood to would be you.

“Over and over, the impression came to me. Each time I got more and more troubled. You know, John, you and I were raised in the church where we heard about such things happening to Christian people. This perplexed me more than words can describe. I tried to make myself believe that this was a mere fantasy of my mind. I even convinced myself that I had been working too hard and would take off some later in the year.

“More and more, the voice came to me impressing me to send some wood out to your place. It became an urgent sensation that I do this. So, in order to have peace and some sanity, I ordered my worker to take a load of the best cord-wood out to your place. “Then, I had no longer done this foolish thing before a voice told me to ‘send a package of candles, too!’ This was too much. I knew that I was definitely not going to give in to this extraordinary impulse. With no one around, I said out loud, ‘This is too absurd. I’m not going to gratify this whim!’

“But, John, as you suspect by now, I grew so self-tormented and distressed that I handed the driver a large package of the big, round candles that we use here.”

John was on edge of his seat as Mr. Graff continued. “John, I want you to know that I’ve been tormented even worse since I did this. I haven’t been able to get it off my mind. When the driver came and said that there were only the kids out at your place when he dropped off the wood and gave the candles to a little boy, I be-

gan to wonder if maybe I was beginning to have some freaks of insanity. But then, that impression was so strong, so unexpected, and so solemn and powerful that ever since I sent those things out to your place, I have also felt that it might really be supernatural.”

John stood to his feet, walked around the desk and looked down into the baffled eyes of his old friend. Let me tell you something that’ll prove to you that you weren’t losing your mind. You see, this morning my daughter came to me and told me that we were out of wood and candles. I haven’t told anyone about this, but not only is my wife dying, but we lost every cent we had when the bank foreclosed on the note I signed with my neighbor farmer friend.”

“That’s too bad,” Graff said, “I had no idea.”

“Well,” John continued, “when I realized that I had been spending so much time caring for my wife at her bedside that I had neglected to provide enough food, wood, and candles for my family, I had to act quickly. So, I went into my bedroom this morning all by myself and asked God to help me get the wood and candles. We had some food on hand, not much, but enough to last a few days. And when I left the house after praying like that, I felt that God was going to give me the wood and candles by giving me work to do today. So, my friend, when you got the impression to send those things out to my house, not knowing anything about my situation, it was indeed supernatural. It was the doings of ‘Him who is wonderful in working.’ ”

The distiller stood to his feet, reached over and grasped John’s hand, not in the way of saying goodbye, but held it. “Now, John, we both know what has happened. I’m dying inside to know what time it was when you went into your room to pray. You see, it was shortly after ten o’clock when I first heard the voice in your behalf.”

“Graff,” John said, giving his hand an even firmer hold, “just as I knelt down on the rug beside my bed, the clock struck ten times.” □□□

(This story was reprinted from the book, *The Hand That Still Intervenes*, W. A. Spicer and Helen Spicer Menkel © 1982 by Concerned Publications. Permission to reprint this article was graciously granted by the publishers.)

Christ Our Righteousness

The Victory of Faith

1. How are the just to live? **Romans 1:17**

Before continuing, please read 2 Chronicles 20:1-24

2. Whose God did Jehoshaphat claim Jehovah was? **2 Chronicles. 20:6, 7** (See Note 1)

3. What Scriptural requirement did the king meet? **Hebrews 11:6**

4. Whom were the eyes of Israel upon? **2 Chronicles 20:12**

5. Does God require help in saving man? **2 Chronicles 14:11**

6. Why do the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth? **2 Chronicles 16:9**

7. The Prayer of Jehoshaphat was in conformity to what apostolic injunction? **Hebrews 12:2**

8. According to the prophet Jahaziel, to whom did the battle belong? **2 Chronicles 20:15**

9. After the command to go forth in the morning, what were the children of Israel to see? **2 Chronicles 20:17**

10. What did Jehoshaphat do after admonishing the people to believe in the LORD? **2 Chronicles 20:21**

11. When the singers began to sing, what did the LORD do? **2 Chronicles 20:22**

12. What is the victory that overcomes the world? **1 John 5:4** (See Note 2)

13. Why were these things written? **Romans 15:4**

Notes:

1. That was an excellent beginning of a prayer. It starts with a recognition of God in heaven. So the model prayer begins, Our Father who art in heaven. What does this signify? That God, as God in heaven, is Creator. It carries with it the recognition of His power over all the kingdoms of the world and of the powers of darkness; the fact that He is in heaven, the Creator, show that in His hand there is power and might, so that none is able to withstand Him. (*Christ Our Righteousness*, p. 83)

2. Let us now apply this illustration in a case of conflict against sin. Here comes a strong temptation to do a thing known to be wrong. We have often proved to our sorrow the strength of the temptation, because it has vanquished us, so that we know that we have no might against it. But now our eyes are upon the Lord, who has told us to come with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. So we begin to pray to God for help. And we pray to the God that is revealed to us in the Bible as the Creator of heaven and earth. We begin, not with a mournful statement of our weakness, but with a joyful acknowledgment of God's mighty power. That being settled, we can venture to state our difficulty and our weakness. If we state our weakness first, and our discouraging situation, we are placing ourselves before God. In that case, Satan will magnify the difficulty and throw his darkness around us so that we can see nothing else but our weakness; and so, although our cries and pleading may be fervent and agonizing, they will be in vain because they will lack the essential element of believing that God is, and that He is all that He has revealed Himself to be. But when we start with a recognition of God's power, then we can safely state our weakness, for then we are simply placing our weakness by the side of His power, and the contrast tends to beget courage.

Then, as we pray, the promise of God comes to our mind, brought there by the Holy Spirit. It may be that we can think of no special promise that exactly fits the case; but we can remember that this is a faithful saying,

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and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15); and that He gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present world, according to the will of God and our Father (Gal. 1:4); and we may know that this carried with it every promise, for He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Rom. 8:32.

Then we remember that God can speak of those things that are not as though they were. That is, if God gives a promise, it is as good as fulfilled already. And so, knowing that our deliverance from evil is according to the will of God (Gal. 1:4), we count the victory as already ours, and begin to thank God for His exceeding great and precious promises. As our faith grasps these promises and makes them real, we cannot help praising God for His wonderful love; and while we are doing this, our minds are wholly taken from evil, and the victory is ours. The Lord sets ambushments against the enemy. Our ascription of praise shows to Satan that we have ob-

tained reinforcements; and, as he has tested the power of the help that is granted to us, he knows that he can do nothing on that occasion, and so he leaves us. This illustrates the force of the apostle's injunction: Be careful for nothing [that is, do not worry about anything]; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. Phil. 4:6. (*Christ Our Righteousness*, pp. 86-88)

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