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Jonah

Part 2

Steve Walvatne

In our first paper, we looked at Jonah "The Messenger," pondering possible clues to his spiritual fitness. We discovered several commendable traits that should highlight the character of all God's servants. Now, we turn to the second verse in chapter one and consider,

The Mission

"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me."

We'll look at this under four headings that highlight how Jonah received,

A SUDDEN EXHORTATION:

"Arise"

A SPECIFIC DESTINATION:

"Go to Nineveh, that great city"

A SOLEMN OBLIGATION:

"Cry against it"

A SOVEREIGN EXPLANATION:

"For their wickedness is come up before Me"

A Sudden Exhortation

The Lord's timing is perfect. He commissions at precise moments and often the swiftness of it startles the servant. We don't know what Jonah was doing when this call came, we're merely told, *"And the word of Jehovah came unto Jonah...saying"* (JND). But that's all we need to know, for Jehovah's call is always paramount to our personal activities and needs. Or, at least it should be. *"...Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you"* (Matt. 6:33). "The disciple's wish and resolve must be to live in God's way...under

God's direction and control" (R.T. France: *New International Commentary on the New Testament*, Matthew).

Jonah was to "Arise" or "get going." The command enjoined "immediate and dramatic action" (Spiros Zodhiates: *The Complete Word Study Old Testament*). Others like Jacob and Joshua, Gideon and Samuel, Philip and Ananias, heard a similar summons. Samuel Burn states in *The Prophet Jonah*, that without exception, Heaven's command to "Arise" brought prompt obedience in Scripture: "Even the dead," he says, "were aroused thereby" (Mk. 5:41; Lk. 7:14).

All Christians should respond in kind, yet we know through experience how difficult obedience can be. It is good, however, to be available for divine service. If saints aren't careful, present day demands will squelch their spiritual exercise. So will exorbitant lifestyles. Many who once harbored genuine yearnings after God, have succumbed to "things that are in the world" (1 Jn. 2:15), becoming enslaved by huge debt or enticed by soft living. As a result, they have now lost the will or capacity to "arise" if the Lord beckons.

Something similar happened to Jewish captives in Babylon. After a time, many no longer *"wept, when [they] remembered Zion"* (Ps. 137:1). When a door back to Jerusalem finally opened, only a remnant returned to the city of divine presence. Multitudes preferred Babylon's riches to Jerusalem's ruins, despite the steep costs involved. Babylonian Jews lost their national identity and never again participated in united worship and service to God (see the book of Esther).

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In 2 Peter 1:9, the apostle labels this condition, “myopia” or “short-sightedness,” referring to Christians so absorbed in earthly vanities, they no longer live in view of eternity. Writes Lenski, “This is not a pagan who never heard the Word and is therefore blind; this is a person who knows about the Word, but has only a useless glimmer left in his heart” (*Commentary on the New Testament*, 2 Peter). May the Lord preserve our spiritual vision, that if He calls to service, we may go enthusiastically. For at a time not far off, God’s word to “Arise” won’t be for service, but for glory (Song 2:13).

Soon, with joyful, glad surprise,
We shall hear Thy word – Arise!
Mounting upward to the skies:
Glory, glory, glory!

S. Trevor Francis

A Specific Destination

The Lord directed Jonah to a particular place: “Go to Nineveh, that great city.” As “Lord of the harvest” (Matt. 9:38), He knows where every single saint belongs. His is not a vague, unspecified summons, but one clearly defined. We might labor a lifetime there, or a fraction of that, but we must “go” to the place, not of our choosing, but of His.

Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, was booming in Jonah’s day. A sworn enemy of Israel, it earned the reputation “great” (1:2; 3:2; 4:11), because it excelled in *size*, *substance*, *structures*, and *strength*. It oversaw a brutal regime that also excelled in *sin*. Patrick Fairbairn says Nineveh was “reported to have been ‘much greater than Babylon,’ and to have been surrounded with walls ‘a hundred feet high, and so broad that three wagons might be driven on them abreast.’ These walls, we are further informed, were fortified with 1500 towers at proper distances, each rising 200 feet in height, and rendering the whole so strong that the city was thought to be impregnable” (*Jonah: His Life and Character and Mission*). With a circumference of sixty miles or “three days journey” (3:1), it was home to nearly a million people, including 120,000 infants (4:11).

Natural reasoning would question the wisdom of sending one lone man to a city so great. To us, a battalion would hardly seem sufficient. But God’s thoughts are not our thoughts, nor His ways our ways (Isa. 55:8). “There is no restraint (or, hindrance) to the Lord to save by many or by few” (1 Sam. 14:6). Whole regions, rural and urban, have known gospel blessing through the labors of one or two servants. Theirs is a taxing work, and lonely. “I don’t see anybody I know here,” wrote Oliver Smith to a daughter, as he pioneered new territory near Clayton, Iowa in the 1920s. In *John Knox McEwen and Pioneer Work in the Maritimes*, John Dickson recalls a wintry morning in 1883, when McEwen exited a train in Amherst, Nova Scotia for the first

time. “Passengers hurried off, each going in his own direction,” wrote Dickson, but “there was no one to meet this stranger...” Stopping in an abandoned stable, the lone preacher kneeled on the snowy floor and “poured out his heart to God...that God would make his coming to Nova Scotia, a blessing to many.”

We appreciate servants that “stick by the stuff” year after year, in spite of hardships, seeking to honor God in their appointed sphere. In addition, we think of “little flocks”—some situated in “great” cities – where handfuls of Christians meet to maintain assembly testimony. The going may be difficult and the outlook seem dim, but “a home with our God will make up for it all” (Henry Lyte).

A Solemn Obligation

Jonah was to “cry against” or “denounce” Nineveh. Its streets and squares would be his pulpit. There, he would “cry aloud, spare not, [and] lift up [his] voice like a trumpet” (Isa. 58:1). It was a solemn obligation that demanded courage and clarity. It also required spiritual competence. To undertake a task of this nature without proper authority and fitness would be a huge mistake. Monumental tasks are manageable if God has qualified and called His servant. Men like David Livingston, William Carey, Hudson Taylor, and Adoniram Judson were undoubtedly, suited by God, for the harsh environments and diverse nationalities they encountered. Their gifts and goals meshed beautifully, and this resonated with people in districts where they labored.

Noah’s generation was evil continually (Gen. 6:5), and Noah stood apart as a “preacher of righteousness” (2 Pet. 2:5). His words and ways were a daily reproof to the rampant wickedness around him. Our age, like Noah’s and Nineveh’s here, reeks equally of sin, yet where are the cries against evil today? Modern religion has muffled its censure. It excuses gross sin and sympathizes with evildoers. Unless we’re vigilant, a wretched complacency will envelop our own hearts. Never has the need been greater, for fit and faithful heralds to warn of coming doom “under the windows of the rich, in the resorts of the poor...before nobles and judges and all” (W.G. Blaikie: *The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 14). Such was Jonah’s mission. It was his solemn obligation.

A Sovereign Explanation

The end of verse 2 explains God’s purpose for sending Jonah to Nineveh: “For their wickedness is come up before Me.” Something similar occurs in passages like Genesis 4:10 regarding Cain, Genesis 18:20-21 regarding Sodom and Gomorrah, and Lamentations 1:22 with reference to Jerusalem’s foes. In each place, sin is so heinous that it reaches the very throne of God, demanding righteous pun-

ishment. Pertaining to Nineveh, this statement “does not imply that the Lord was previously unaware of that great city’s depravity; rather, the situation there so degenerated that His patience [was] overshadowed by the mandate of justice” (John Walton: *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Revised Edition)).

We learn, therefore, that God’s mercy has limits. It extended another 120 years in the antediluvian world (Gen. 6:3), was down to forty days at Nineveh, and ended at nightfall for Belshazzar (Dan. 5:30). “*He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy*” (Pr. 29:1). Mercy rejected, inevitably leads, to mercy being retracted.

There’s a line that is drawn by rejecting our Lord,
Where the call of His Spirit is lost,
As you hurry along with the pleasure-mad throng,
Have you counted, have you counted, the cost?
A.J. Hodge

Paul agonized over fellow Jews, who foolishly “hoarded” to themselves, wrath against the day of wrath (Rom. 2:5). He knew that in a coming day, such would “be surprised to find [they had] stored up, not treasures of good, but treasures of divine wrath!” (James Dunn: *Word Biblical Commentary*: vol. 38A). How solemn! How searching! To think that no praise, no prayers, and no piety reach God’s throne, only wickedness from sinner’s whose putrefying sores have “not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment” (Isa. 1:6)! Let sinners beware. Yours is a perilous standing, a slippery slope, from which you might plunge momentarily, into utter despair. “...*For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*” (Gal. 6:7). What if YOUR sins, like Nineveh’s, should reach God’s throne today?

The church's mission is not to fit in to the world, but to see men changed so that they will fit in to the church.

Doctrine and Practice

“*Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.*” (1 Timothy 4: 16)

We hear such statements as, “doctrine divides” or “doctrine is boring” or “doctrine will lose the attention of the audience and put them to sleep.” It’s a sad state that we are in, if doctrine, upon which practice ought to be based, is diplomatically hushed, then shown out the door, so that our itching ears might be placated with that which sits better on our violated consciences and wayward wills. Paul made it clear to young Timothy that the doctrine of the Word of God would be that which preserved Timothy as well as those

who heard his teaching of it. It would change their behavior and thus save them from the disobedience, and consequences of such, that characterizes the unbeliever.

In his excellent work on Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, Moule notes this as he considers the movement from doctrinal revelation to practical teaching in the middle of the letter. He states, “we pass from the revelation of doctrine to the development of practice. Of course this must be said with some qualification. In the first part we have had practice implied and alluded to: as where (2: 10) St. Paul tells us that we were “*created in Christ Jesus unto good works,*” and indeed in the manifest holy bearing of the entire exposition. And in the second part we shall find passage upon passage where doctrine is announced and enforced; some of these passages are as important as any of their kind in the New Testament. Altogether we find truth and life, here in Ephesians, as generally in Scripture, so closely, so vitally interwoven that it is impossible to treat either of the two as really isolated. Doctrine runs of itself into practice, in the minds of the Apostles, and practice always feels its footing in doctrine. Let the suggestion given us by this fact never be forgotten by the Christian teacher.”

Doctrine, rather than dividing, indeed unites as is so clearly taught to the Ephesians (ch. 4: 1-24); and rather than boring or sedating the true believer, causes him to stand in awe of all that God is, does, and yet purposes through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ (ch. 1: 17-23; ch. 3: 14-21).

O that our hearts would be softened, and our spiritual appetites whetted for the doctrines of God’s Holy Word. That we might be weaned away from our cravings for the philosophies and psychologies of soulish wisdom and become a people who are characterized by hunger for the true doctrine from above, should be our prayer one and all. Were the doctrines of God to become precious to us, these things which are causing such spiritual malnutrition would be disposed of as they ought, and our practices would reflect the light of divine principles rather than cloud their illumination of others who are looking for light in an ever darkening world.

When God’s doctrines are sought after, cherished, and appreciated, godly practice follows without exception because the all-sufficiency of His thoughts, purposes, and intentions fill the regenerated soul, causing it to bow to His sovereignty in willing and joyful obedience.

May the Lord of the churches help both those who teach and those who hear to realize that doctrine and practice are inextricable linked in the Word of God, and so should be in our presentation of it, whether in private counsel or in public meetings.

What is His Name? Jehovah-M'Kaddesh

Joel Portman

“Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God. And ye shall keep my statutes and do them: I am the LORD which sanctify you.” “Thou shalt sanctify him therefore; for he offereth the bread of thy God: he shall be holy unto thee: for I the LORD, which sanctify you, and holy.” (Lev. 20:7-8, 21:8)

Tracing these names of Jehovah in the Old Testament, we can see a logical and spiritual sequence that relates to our own experience as believers in Christ. First we see that He is the One who sees and provides, and what a provision He has made for us in the Person and work of our Lord Jesus! Then we find in Jehovah-rapheca that He heals; His healing relieves more than the bitterness of the pathway, since He also wants to heal our thinking and attitudes so that we learn to trust Him completely. In the ensuing warfare against our spiritual enemies, He is the One who leads and gives the victory, so that we learn our own insufficiency and the need to follow Him dependently. Now we have come to a further step, or another revelation of His person, and that is that He is the One who sanctifies, or sets apart His redeemed people so that they conform to His own character. God's great purpose is more than our salvation from sin and its consequences; it is also to form our lives so that we are conformed to Himself and recognize His claims upon us and the results that should be seen in us. He is the LORD who sanctifies.

These passages of Leviticus are located in the context of God's teaching that deals with the acceptable walk of God's people (18:1-20:27). The first section (1:1-17:16) teaches the means that He has provided by which we can approach unto God, and now we learn further the kind of people who can approach to and walk in God's presence. Our relationship with such an holy God has been established on the ground of (and is maintained by) the work of our Lord Jesus Christ (chs. 1-8). That work stands in all its sufficiency and availability for every child of God. But there is also an expected character of life that is to be seen in His people. Since He is holy, sacrifice must provide the basis for such fellowship with Him, but being brought into that relationship, we must recognize the standard that He expects to see in us.

This is truth that is reinforced in the New Testament, for example, in 1 Peter. 1:13-17, *“As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance, but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, ‘Be ye holy; for I am holy. . .’ Again in 1 Thess. 4:2-3, “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification. . .” “For*

God hath not called us to uncleanness, but unto (in) holiness.” (v.7). Many other passages reinforce the truth of the believer being set apart entirely for God, to be conformed through His work and our personal exercise to be suitable to Him, to represent Him before others by manifesting a like character that expresses the work of the Holy Spirit within.

Meaning of Sanctification

“Sanctify” simply and definitely means, “to be set apart, seen as different, distinct.” The first mention of the word is in Gen. 2:3 with reference to the day when God rested from creation, *“And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.”* So we see a day set apart by God in relation to His completed, creatorial work. We find that there were places thus set apart, and they were called “holy places,” (Mt. Sinai, Tabernacle, Temple, etc.). Israel was to be a holy people, set apart in a distinct position and relationship with God that other nations never enjoyed. They were a “sanctified” people. The priests were “holy” priests, because of their distinct relationship in their service for the Lord. These aspects of things sanctified show us that anything that is in contact with God or which has a unique relationship with God must be in a condition as well as a position that corresponds to Him; it or he/she must be “sanctified”. Since they have been brought into this relationship as a result of His work and purpose, they cannot be like anyone else in the world. They must be like Him in some way, different from others. They are a “peculiar” people, specially enjoying the relationship of grace and knowing Him, who is a holy God.

Thus, godliness in those people is an expression of God's character, a correspondence with Him.

We learn, also, from Haggai 2:10-13, that holiness cannot be conveyed casually to the unholy, but on the other hand, that which is unholy can defile that which is holy so that it no longer represents what is suitable to God. This impresses on our minds the great importance of avoiding all in our lives that would contaminate and ruin our condition before God, either morally or spiritually.

Now that believers are in fellowship with God as His people, they must be separate from all that is inconsistent with the character of God. Bearing His Name and having the indwelling Holy Spirit, there must be results seen in our lives. The Holy Spirit sets the believer apart and gives him the power to maintain that life of separation.

How are we Sanctified?

In the New Testament, we encounter a character of sanctification that is more all-inclusive than marked Israel in the

Old. This is because it deals with more than our outward behavior, but also touches our thoughts and inner lives. We learn from the Lord's teaching in Mt. 5-7, that beyond the deeds, subjects of God's kingdom are called into account for their thoughts and motives. So we see that as saints (sanctified ones), we are

1. Sanctified by His Election (1 Thess. 4:7, 1 Peter 1:15). It is a Holy Calling that expresses His purpose for His own who now are expected to rise to that standard in their behavior.

2. Sanctified by our Salvation (1 Cor. 1:30). Salvation has set a believer in Christ apart from a life of sin to belong exclusively to a Holy Lord, being given power to live a holy life and invested with a desire to be more conformed to the Lord who died for him.

3. Sanctified by our Identification (1 Peter. 1:15). We call Him "Father," so we must have the same character as His, though not to the same degree. It should be our heart's exercise to express this in a practical manner of living.

4. Sanctified by His Operation (1 Thess. 5:23). It is the "God of Peace," who is the sanctifier. He has given peace, and He is the essence of our peace.

Why is this important?

1. Israel was called to be holy because of their association with a holy God, and the same is true for us. That holiness in His people is because of **Who God is**. He is holy in a sense that is beyond our ability to comprehend. Our minds fail to reach to the heights of His holiness. He is not just more holy than we are, or more holy than the holiest person has ever been. He is infinitely holy, being of purer eyes than to look upon sin or behold iniquity (Hab. 1:13). He alone dwells in the light which is unapproachable (1 Tim. 6:16), enveloped in purity and completely separate from every aspect or taint of sin. He cannot and will not tolerate careless, sinful living by His people. That is not to say that we can ever be sinless or absolutely perfect in this life. That is impossible, though it is what we aspire to and long for. However, as one matures in a Christian life and moves along this spiritual pathway, becoming more and more submissive to the control of the Holy Spirit, he also becomes more conscious of sin and develops a greater sensitivity to it. That exercise causes us to seek to practice those things that will please and honor the Lord in our lives.

This is not achieved through living by rules or laws, not a legalistic achievement by conforming to legal requirements. It is rather caused by a deep attraction and occupation with our blessed Lord. This causes us to ask, in every case if such an act is the will of God in our lives.

"Will this please the Lord?" "Will this direction or act honor His Name or show conformity to His person?" "By doing this, can I show my love for Him?" When we look at the practical teaching of 1 Thess. 4:1-12, we learn that this should be the constant exercise of our hearts, that we might abstain from every form of evil (1 Thess. 5:22). God walked in the midst of Israel's camp (Deut. 23:13-14), and it was to be maintained as a holy place so that "*he see no unclean thing in thee.*" That principle should reign in our lives privately, in our homes and in our assemblies.

2. Because of **where the saints are**. We are in a near relationship with God. We learn from 1 John 1:5 that He is light, absolute purity and righteousness. Since we are in the light positionally (and should be practically), we can have fellowship with Him. If we want to enjoy the near relationship with the Lord, we must constantly be seeking to maintain conditions in our lives that are consistent with His person. We can think of Enoch, living in a very unclean environment with ungodliness on every hand, yet walking with God. "*How can two walk together, except they be agreed?*" (Amos 3:3), and clearly Enoch was in agreement with God with regard to the evil world that surrounded him. Jude 14 tells us what he prophesied about those conditions as he observed the ungodly character of men in that day and looked on to the coming of the Lord to judge ungodliness. He was in agreement with God about sin and what it deserved. We read in Heb. 11:5-6, that Enoch pleased God, and it was on the ground of faith that he did so. His was a godly life, walking with God continually for 300 years until God took him. The more that he walked with God, the more evidence of that holiness would have been manifest in his life. This should be true of us as well, and it is possible, if we are thus exercised. One has said, "You can be as holy as you truly want to be."

3. It is also because of **who we represent in this world**. We represent a holy Christ, a holy heavenly Father. The world doesn't read the Bible, but they surely read the lives of Christians, and they form an assessment of our Lord and God from what they see in our lives. Is there reality? Are we consistent with what we profess in our manner of living? Is there waywardness and evident failure to maintain righteous and holy standards in our behavior? Peter warns the believers that they should never suffer as an evil doer (1 Peter 4:15-16). Numerous are the exhortations and solemn teaching that touch on this important subject. Let us not set them aside and make excuses for wrong behavior, but let us rather seek to "*follow (pursue) peace with all (men) and holiness (or sanctification), without which no man shall see the Lord.*" (Heb. 12:14). Bearing His Name, we are responsible to represent Him honorable, in a manner that shows we are "set apart" entirely for Him, and from all that is contrary to His character.

Ambition

E. W. Rogers

It is a good thing for everyone to have an ambition. The base is crowded; the top is sparsely populated. To be contented with things as they are and not to be desirous of improvement betrays an apathy unworthy of any. Of course there are obstacles to be overcome; difficulties to be met and mastered if the object in view is to be attained, but that only makes for the building up of character. This is specially so when the ambition is of a spiritual kind for then spiritual character is developed.

Ambition may be of two kinds, that for one's own personal advancement or that for the attainment of an object with the view of benefiting others. Both have their proper place, though if we follow our Lord we shall ever be willing to give the benefit of others the first place. As a matter of fact the use of the word in the New Testament never has the thought of personal self-advancement. It always has an external object and its good, as we shall see.

Unhappily at the present time, and it has ever been so, ambition is earthbound for the most part and the object of desire has been material advancement or earthly achievement. Very few seem to have a healthy spiritual Christ-like ambition.

Paul uses the word in its verbal form three times and, as might be expected, it is not always on a worldly plane. His word is *philotimeomai*, meaning literally "a loving honor." Yet if the ambition is to be of a proper kind, the honor must be that given by the rightful person. Earthly ambition when achieved is crowned with the acknowledgment of one's worldly superiors. It is not with this that Paul is concerned; the honor that he has in mind is that which is bestowed by God. Yet how many of us are like those to whom the Lord said "*How can ye believe which receive honor one of another and seek not the honor that cometh from the only God?*" (John 5:44). It is, admittedly, not always possible to be "*well pleasing to God and approved of men*" (Rom. 14:18), but if choice has to be made, God has prior claim. Do we esteem the honor that comes from God more highly than that which men may bestow on us?

Paul uses the word once in relation to the believer's personal life, once in relation to the world of lost sinners, and once as to the believer's relationship to the Lord.

"*And that ye study to be quiet and do your own business and to work with your hands even as we charged you that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without and may have need of nothing*" (1 Thess. 4:11 RVmarg). The word study is the word "be ambitious." Paul had himself given an

example of this very thing when in the midst of the Thessalonians by his own actions as witness (2 Thess. 3:8). He could, therefore, very forcibly enjoin them that "*with quietness they work and eat their own bread.*" It was discreditable that any should not be working at all but were busybodies. There is a play on the Greek words, they were busybodies, doing no real business. They were interfering with other people's business. They were sponging on others. It should, however, be a thing to be aimed at that we should show a healthy independence of others, having need of no one and of nothing.

The idleness of some of the Thessalonians at least may have sprung from an abuse of the doctrine which Paul had given touching the coming of the Lord. It is plain that he had taught them that this "coming" might occur at any moment, for its time was altogether unknown to any but the Father; and, therefore, abusing the teaching, they ceased to work while "*waiting for God's Son from Heaven.*" They had forgotten the injunction "*Occupy till I come.*" Some, on the other hand, as would appear from 2 Thess. 3:10 may have been idlers independent altogether from what Paul taught. But whatever the cause, Satan always finds something for idle hands to do, and that something is never good: more likely than enough it will be interference into the affairs of others.

We are not much troubled nowadays with this kind of thing, but the great principle behind the exhortation is not without relevance. We should aim at a "walk," a behavior, that is honorable not only in the sight of our fellow believers but also in the sight of the world — "them that are without." We should walk honorably (Rom. 13:13) and quietly. It is not the boisterous who is necessarily usefully active, for sometimes noise and work in our modern mechanized age do go together, but not always. Many are neither seen nor heard yet are very effectively working.

Paul is very practical; he not only can soar into high doctrines and plump depths of divine truth, but also can come down to earth as to daily living. "*If anyone does not wish to work neither let him eat*" (2 Thess. 3:10). Paul did not eat "any man's bread for naught"; he paid for it. He worked in labor and travail day and night in order not to be a burden to any of them. He forfeited his apostolic and evangelistic right in order to demonstrate in real life how believers ought to be occupied and so render themselves healthily independent of others. It is despicable to sponge on others when the capacity to work is not lacking.

The Ephesians were enjoined: "*Let him that stole steal no more but rather let him labor working with his hands the thing which is good that he may have whereof to give to him that needeth*" (Eph. 4:28). For "*it is better to give than to*

receive” as said the Lord Jesus (Acts 20:35). The daily occupation of the believer should be that which is honorable; he should pursue an “honest occupation” (Titus 3:14 RV marg) or “honest trade” (AV marg). There are ‘lines’ which are unworthy of the Christian however lucrative they may be, but there are plenty of professions or trades open to the believer which he may worthily follow putting him in the happy position of faithfulness to God and independence of men, as well as providing for those of his own house and having wherewith by which he may help the hapless and the Lord’s work and servants.

In Romans 15:20, Paul uses our word ‘ambitious’ in relation to his evangelistic and apostolic work. He had been specially commissioned by the Lord to go to the Gentiles and at the time of writing to the Romans, whose city he had not yet reached, he was able to report that he had thoroughly executed that charge in so extensive an area as from Jerusalem to Illyricum. A glance at the map will show how vast a territory this is. But Paul was ever desirous of pressing on to ‘regions beyond’ those which he had already reached. His ambition was to go to places where the name of Christ was unknown, where the tidings of the cross had not yet come. His not having been to Rome did not spring from fear of Nero, or shame of the gospel (Romans 1, vv. 9 ff) but was caused by his being hindered many times despite his various attempts.

Now we must not be satisfied with reading this merely as a part of Paul’s autobiography. It has lessons for us which we must not fail to learn. The unevangelized heathen are not far from our doors today. True, there are few parts of the earth where the name of Christ has never at some time or other been named, even though heathen religions now hold sway. We must never forget we live late in the day — the eleventh hour — but we live in times when other men’s labors have, in many cases, disappeared due to the suppression of the ruling powers, or the judicial darkening of lands once highly favored with the gospel, as to wit, North Africa. Often it is necessary in such places to start altogether afresh, laying the foundation because the present generation knows nothing whatever of what formerly had been done.

Look out, then, for such soil. It may be found in sections of the world’s vast cities or in some smaller town or area. The thing is to have the ambition to spread the gospel so that those who do not know it are informed of it, and that will entail your telling the man or woman with whom you next come in contact. Do not suppose that because you live in a so-called Christian country that its inhabitants know the gospel. Most have no idea of it for there are very few who faithfully preach it.

Had anyone challenged Paul why he went to the Gentiles

and did not limit himself to the Jew, he would among his detailed answers have been able to cite Isaiah 52:15 (see Romans 15:21) as being his scriptural authority. He read the passage as having a voice to him and it inspired him with the desire to do the very thing named in the verse. Of course he knew its prophetic bearing, but he was then and there concerned with its present message. We should read Scripture in a like manner.

The matter seems to have been questioned in the Corinthian church and Paul himself meets the challenge in 2 Corinthians 10:14-16 not selfishly, restricting to himself the honor of taking the gospel to the “regions beyond” but encouraging the saints to have their part in the matter. Paul did not look for a ready-made audience, or hall, or other things. He went where none of these things were and pioneered the gospel, breaking up fresh ground. Others could follow up what he had done but he made it his ambition first to break new soil. It is not given to everyone now-a-days to do this: it requires young manhood, physical strength, vision, enterprise, courage, ambition. To the few that have such we should give every encouragement.

In 2 Cor. 5:9, Paul and Timothy state that they “*make it their aim whether at home or absent to be well-pleasing to Him.*” It is important to read this in the R.V. for the question of our ‘acceptance’ with God is not in view. That is settled (Eph. 1:6.) But not all are well-pleasing to Him. The whole of the context must be read to see the force of this. Paul’s outward man, his physical frame, is perishing but the inward man is being renewed day by day. His preoccupation is not with things that are seen which are temporal, be they his afflictions or anything else, but with things unseen which are eternal. He has the earnest of the Spirit within giving him assurance as to the reality of unseen things; he has the vision of faith, for his judgment is not formed by external appearance. Indeed, eternal things were so real to him that he would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. However, whilst in the body he made it his aim to be well-pleasing to the Lord, because he knew that there lay ahead of him the Judgment-Seat when everything and everyone would come out in his true light. He would be seen as the man that he actually is and not as the man that he might think himself to be or others might think him to be or to have been.

Every believer has to appear at the Judgment Seat and, therefore every believer should have the ambition to be well-pleasing to the Lord. Each will be discovered then as to what his true character is — the character that he has formed on earth will be revealed then. His physical body has been the instrument of doing things either good or worthless (phaula) and such actions are like boomerangs; they come back and leave their mark on one’s character.

They have been as bricks built into the character of our life. We are as it were running an account which will be balanced at the Judgment Seat; the good we have done will be on the credit side; the worthless we have done will be on the debit side of our heavenly register and the net result will be the character with which we will commence Eternity. Turn to Ephesians 6:8 and Colossians 3:25 (RV marg); ponder these two passages. We shall receive the good things: we shall receive again the wrong. Things will then come home to roost. Suffering loss will reduce proportionately the gain that we may have accumulated against that day.

In that day all the veneer will be stripped off. Any wax which has been used to conceal the cracks which we know to exist in our lives will then be melted in the sunlight of the presence of the Lord. We shall not then be able to wear a mask, nor would we wish to do so. We shall only be too happy to have everything brought to the surface and in the light of His holy presence to be manifested in its true or worthlessness, and to embark on Eternity free from all those things which may have robbed us of our reward or have militated against our being conformed to the image of God's Son.

These things, then, should be our ambition: (a) a quiet, godly industrious life; (b) a zeal to spread the knowledge of the name of Christ to as many as we can of those who have not heard of Him; and (c) to live so that we have the consciousness now and the acknowledgment later of our being well-pleasing to the Lord.

Could any ambition be better than this? Such will adjust every other ambition and subordinate them to these three priorities.

**Temporal riches are obtained by acquiring;
eternal by renouncing.**
Panin

An Assembly's Own Responsibility

F. Butcher

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," (Phil. 2:12).

The natural tendency of the human heart is to rely upon an arm of flesh. The solemn word of the Lord says, *"Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm,"* (Jer. 17:5). It is not easy for us to keep this independency of man, and to trust wholly in the Lord.

This does not imply a casting aside, as of no account, the fellowship of our brethren. Paul did not confer with flesh and blood as to his ministry, yet he went up to Jerusalem later by revelation and communicated to those who seemed to be somewhat, the Gospel which he preached, in order that he might enjoy their fellowship; still he relied upon the Lord.

In this article we desire to speak of the responsible status of a local Assembly of believers. It is a question that has caused much controversy as to whether the Assemblies should unite into a sort of organization, or whether each Assembly ought to be responsible to the Lord alone? Again, if the Assemblies unite, should there be some central authority, perhaps only tacitly acknowledged, to regulate difficulties that might arise in any local Church? The governments of this world prefer that Churches should unite, and have a set creed, with some one, or body of men, at the head with whom the state can have to do, and through whom it can exercise control. This is about where all the denominations stand. The most compact body in the religious world undoubtedly is the R. C. system, with an infallible pope at the head; in which no local congregation is allowed to act independently, or to cultivate direct responsibility to the Lord. Such a thing would be frowned upon and mercilessly nipped in the bud. In all State Churches—Jezebel's children, Rev. 2:20—the same principle is maintained in a milder form. The original Puritans taught the responsibility of the local Church, hence were called "Independents." They have in a great measure left their own principles and formed Church systems that are so tolerant that any error can now build its nest in their branches.

For the ingenuous child of God, the question is not what others do, nor what appears most suitable to the human heart, nor what the State prefers, but what saith the Scripture? The Lord alone, the Head of the Church, has the right, and is able to say what honors Him, and is best for the Assembly in its separation from the world, and for each individual Christian.

In the New Testament there is no trace of a federation of Churches; and no mention of a human head over the Churches in a city or province. What is not found in the word no person has a right to introduce, and all that has been introduced has only served to blur the true biblical ideal and hinder God's work. Why is it so difficult to go by the word? Why does man always prefer his own bungling creeds to the revealed will of God? *"To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them,"* (Isa. 8:20.)

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," (Phil. 2:12). This passage has nothing to do with individual

salvation, although it is often so used, and frequently as a proof that salvation has to be worked for with fear and trembling, and that therefore no person can have the assurance of salvation, thus making it contradict the teaching of Scripture. In this verse we have a clear thought as to how an Assembly must work out its own salvation when those who had been working there were removed from them. The apostle and others had worked in Philippi. He was their spiritual father, and when difficulties arose, as they do in every Assembly, they looked to Paul for advice and help. The care of all the Churches came upon him daily, (2 Cor. 11:28).

The Philippian saints had always obeyed him when he was present, and even more when he was absent; now, however, for the future they were not to rely upon him, he was in prison and his life in jeopardy; they were therefore called upon to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. They were cast upon their own responsibility before God. If a perplexity arose they could not send post haste to Paul for directions as to what to do, but were to seek guidance from God with fear and trembling lest they make a mistake. This verse teaches clearly that an Assembly is not dependent upon a bishop, president, chairman, or other personality from outside. They did not require to appeal to Jerusalem, or Antioch, or Rome to help them out of their difficulties. They are cast upon their own responsibility; and yet not upon their own, *“It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do His good pleasure,”* (v.13). On their part fear and trembling were necessary, and God would guide by the Holy Spirit, and His word, so that their decisions would be well pleasing to Him.

Is that enough for an Assembly? May a weak company of believers work out its own salvation in a case of bewildering perplexity? We reply with a certain and joyful, “Yes.” They can, as a brother once remarked, *“Cast four anchors out of the stern; and wait for day.”* Still the way is not always easy, for the flesh seeks to play a leading part, even trembling with anger: but where godly fear and trembling are present, emanating from a sense of weakness, one may confidently reckon on God's deliverance.

In the denominations the members become dependent upon the minister, and having no exercise become atrophied. Being under a central authority the congregation has no responsibility, and so feels no necessity to work out its own salvation. The sense of their responsibility to the Lord is smothered.

While apostolic Assemblies were to work out their own salvation, on the other hand they were to cultivate fellowship with each other. In the epistles to the Corinthians we read of a collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem, and

the Churches of Achaia, Macedonia and Galatia worked together in this fruitful service. In the seven Churches of Asia the lampstands were not chained together, still John was told to write the messages in a book—not seven books—and send it to the seven Churches; each could read what was written to the others. Ephesus was the capital, but it was not blamed for disorder in Thyatira: and Laodicea is not censured for not being more subject to Ephesus. Paul hoped to send Timothy to Philippi after his trial, meanwhile Epaphroditus goes to them with the epistle. Here is care, love and fellowship; he desires to help and not to reign; he is a servant and not an ecclesiastical dignitary.

When Paul said farewell to the Ephesian elders we catch the deep pathos of his heart as we hear him say, *“And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace,”* (Acts 20:22). He did not commend them to some council elsewhere. They had God and the word of His grace; could an Assembly have anything better? It is good when an Assembly knows a godly experienced brother to whom it can turn for help in the proper application of Scripture to the conscience: but no Church, council, or conference of elders has the right to frame new regulations, or to decide difficult questions for other Assemblies. No central authority has any scriptural right for its existence. Each Assembly has the whole word of God, and the poured out Spirit who leads into all truth: and if there be godly fear and holy trembling in rich measure in the hearts of the overseeing brethren, and of all the saints, then grace, wisdom and power will be granted for every contingency.

Israel was condemned for having a zeal for God without knowledge (Rom. 10:2); Zeal without knowledge brings condemnation; knowledge without zeal expresses coldness.

“Let us....”

J. G. Good
(AT May/June 1980)

This letter was written to deliver from the old order of things, i.e., Judaism, and by virtue of the subject matter of the epistle, prevent a return thereto. The writer contrasts all that pertained to the old order, with the excelling glory of the Son of God, the substance of every shadow, the anti-type of every type, the complete and final revelation of God. Again, this One is the Creator, Upholder, Sin Purger, Serpent Crusher, living in the power of an endless life with a priesthood which is intransmissible, of this One and no

other can it be said, *"Thou art a Priest for ever"* Heb. 7:21.

The Hebrew believers were in the crucible of suffering, *"a fight of afflictions"* (10:32), they *"took joyfully the spoiling of your goods"* (10:34). The struggle to renounce that which was God given, the persecution which would follow such a decision is momentous. The writer in circumstances such as these, would remind them that the loss incurred by them as a result of embracing the rejected Lord Jesus Christ, was temporary, in contrast, the blessings gained were eternal and spiritual. *"We have a great High Priest"* (4:14), *"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul"* (6:19), and *"Ye have in heaven"* (10:34).

To encourage to this goal, the writer, with pathos and feeling, continually exhorts, "Let us:" "also fear" (4:1), "hold fast" (4:14), "draw near" (4:16), "go on" (6:1), "draw near" (10:22), "hold fast" (10:23), "consider" (10:24), "lay aside" (12:1). "have grace" (13:13), "offer" (13:15), "go forth" (13:13).

Three of the foregoing exhortations form the basis of this present meditation;

1. Let us go on to Know Him (6:1)

The Hebrews had failed to make progress in Divine things, they were spiritual dwarfs, the 'full growth' carries the thought of spiritual maturity. This is not in any way connected with age, but with spiritual experience. The Christian life is not static and stationary, but positive and progressive. The words of Paul in Phil. 3:12 "I press on" corroborate this thought of experimental knowledge being necessary to spiritual growth. There is a grave danger of thinking that the experience of being saved is sufficient, and the sole requirement of the child of God. The Word of God, teaches the opposite, the receiving of God's salvation is only the beginning, and unless we know in reality a 'daily salvation' (7:25), growing in grace will be a distinct impossibility. There can be no appetite for the Word of God unless there is a laying aside, of those things which retard spiritual growth. (1 Pet. 2:1). It is the desire of our God that by growing we shall reach maturity, *"Unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"* (Eph. 4:13, Hosea 6:3). There were three things that marked Samuel: the mantle of prophecy, the ephod of priesthood, and the coat of progress. Are we going on to know the Lord, let us 'sound,' (Acts 27:28), and see if a change of course is required to bring us to the desired haven. Of this there can be no doubt that spiritual growth is the forerunner of spiritual prosperity (Psalm 144:12-15).

2. Let us go in to Enjoy Him (10:22)

What a truth is here emphasized, the free way of access in to the Holiest of All, the innermost shrine of God's abiding

presence. The boldness of our entrance being the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. On the basis of this glorious fact, that the veil has been rent in the midst, (Luke 23:45), and from the top to the bottom. (Matt. 27:51), the exhortation is given, "Let us draw near." The veil which typified the humanity of the Lord Jesus, rent that we might go in!

We thank Thee for the precious blood,
Which purged our sins and brought us nigh,
All cleansed and sanctified to God,
Thy Holy Name to magnify

We have three words used in this chapter, used in connection with the worshippers, worthy of note, the second verse, "once purged" i.e. cleansed, v.10, "sanctified," i.e. separated to God, and in v.14, "perfected" i.e. to perpetuity, (Newberry), once for all, the thought of finality, a finished fitness for the presence of God, not for a particular period of time, but **forever**. This grand truth of the ever-open way into the presence of God, is enjoyed so little! Why? The reality of heavenly things, and the experimental knowledge of God's presence with us, will only be our portion in the measure that we "draw near." Is the Lord Jesus Christ, the living bright reality. He is prepared to be, to each one of us? This is a glorious possibility, if we are prepared to draw near into the peace of His presence to enjoy Him!

3. Let us go out to Be with Him (13:13).

"Let us go forth unto Him," the magnetic Person of Christ. How suggestive are the words recorded by Mark 1:45: *"and they came to Him from every quarter."* The malcontents of the nation of Israel went to the cave of Adullam, (1 Sam. 22:1). Why? David was there! Have we gone forth unto HIM! The 'camp' mentioned here refers to Judaism with all its religion, we must remember that the temple was still functioning when this epistle was written. The 'camp' today would indicate a place, where the Lordship of Christ is denied, and the Word of God has not its rightful place. Christendom at large would fall into this category! The writer uses strong language, as if in a final appeal, *"we have an altar whereof they who are serving the tabernacle have no right to eat"* (v.10). The Levitical priesthood has no part in the cross work of the Lord Jesus Christ, to partake of the blessings of the sin offering of Calvary, there must be a forsaking of the camp of Judaism, these indeed were solemn words to the Hebrew, and reproach of necessity would follow such a step. The sin offering of Lev. 6:30 reminds us that when the blood was brought into the Holy Place by the High Priest, the flesh was not eaten, but burned without the camp. The place of separation and rejection is the portion of all who would be identified with the One who suffered without the gate.

Let us go forth UNTO HIM!