



TOWARD THE MARK

***“I PRESS TOWARD THE MARK FOR THE PRIZE
OF THE HIGH CALLING OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS.”
PHILIPPIANS 3:14***

***A MAGAZINE FOR YOUNG CHRISTIANS
OF ALL AGES***

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Dear Reader,

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

This is what some may call the “proper Christian experience,” but before Paul could say, “For me to live is Christ,” Christ had to live in him! Although here Paul states that for him to live is Christ, he says elsewhere, “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me.” What a wonderful thing for him to say: “Christ lives in me.” Is Christ just? Christ lived in him. Is Christ righteous? Christ lived in him. Is Christ gracious? Christ lived in him. Is Christ compassionate? Christ lived in him. Is Christ merciful? Christ lived in him. He is not righteous at the expense of grace. He is not gracious at the expense of truth. Christ lived in him. That was the impression produced by the power of the Spirit of God in him, and therefore the expression was “for me to live is Christ.” Oh, what a Christian experience, willing to live down here in his present circumstances to bring glory and honor to Christ.

The great thing for us is to seek to “live Christ,” to walk humbly and in great fear, but the greatest fear of all is ourselves. The worst enemy is within, and therefore what we want is simply to look to Christ: that He might command the vision of our souls, that He might be the object of attraction for us, and that He might govern and command us as we are passing through this world. Our time is short. We are here for a little time—to live for Him. That is our purpose for being here. By and by, when we have been in heaven ten thousand years, we shall still go on forever to sing His praise. The great thing now is to walk in His fear, simply, quietly, and calmly; to seek grace at His hands; to walk in His steps; and to pass through the world with the smile of God, with the commendation of God. For the Christian experience is the experience produced in a Christian by the Spirit of Christ.

It is our prayer that the Lord will use *Toward the Mark* to help you to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Him.

Please keep praying for the Lord’s blessing on *Toward the Mark*.

Yours in our soon-coming Lord,

Emil S. Nashed

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Quotations from Scripture are generally taken either from the King James translation or the J.N. Darby translation.

MILK

"The truth shall make you free"

PROVING GOD'S WILL!

If we are to know the will of God, nothing can compare with considering the blessed person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He could say in perfect truth, "I come to do thy will, O God" (Hebrews 10:9). Is it possible for God's will to be done on earth when everywhere men's wills are set in bold defiance of God, with rebellion, confusion, and corruption gaining the ascendancy in every nation? The answer is beautifully seen in the lowly Man of sorrows, faithful, obedient, devoted to the will of God in every detail of His life of simple, steadfast faith, and supremely in His offering Himself in sacrifice on the cross of Calvary, that God might be glorified in the salvation of innumerable sinners. What an object to draw the heart of every believer to be deeply desirous of doing the will of God in his own short life on earth!

HIS WILL IN THE GREATEST THINGS

Can we know the will of God? In many things, yes; but we can only know this absolutely as it is revealed in the Word of God. For instance, we can know absolutely that every true believer has been predestinated to the great blessing of sonship "according to the good pleasure of His [God's] will" (Ephesians 1:5). Also, concerning the Church of God, "Now God has set the members, each one of them in the body just as He pleased" (1 Corinthians 12:18). His Word declares this; therefore, we may know it as being absolutely the will of God. Similarly, many other great blessings of God are declared in His Word to be given to believers. He has revealed that it is His own will that has decreed such great blessing for us. We rightly rejoice in the majestic glory and grace and beauty of a will so full of goodness.

HIS WILL AS TO OUR CONDUCT

On the other hand, God has expressed His will in His Word as to many things that have to do with our practical, daily lives. Do we rejoice in His expressed will as to what our conduct should be? These things we may know absolutely also, as for instance, "This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality."

Many other scriptures show us clearly what kind of conduct is right and becoming. Let us be well acquainted with these through reading and meditation.

Certainly, in all of these we may know what the will of God is, for God has declared it.

The Lord Jesus knew the will of God, but more than that, He did the will of God. We need therefore a word from His own lips: "If anyone wills to do His (God's) will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God" (John 7:17). If we desire to know the will of God, let us first seriously test ourselves as to why. Do we want to find out whether it is acceptable to us or not? Or do we really desire to practice God's will? Of course, God knows our motives. When the remnant of Israel came to Jeremiah to ask him to enquire of God, they told him they would without fail obey God's Word when it was given them (Jeremiah 42:5-6); but God knew that they dissembled in their hearts (v. 20), and only intended to obey if it suited their thoughts.

If we do not have the honest intention of doing the will of God, or at least of being willing to do it, then we shall never be given the firm conviction of the teaching of God's Word. If we desire to do His will, we shall know of the doctrine, that is, the teaching: it will be vital and real to us.

HIS WILL AS TO PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

There is, however, an area in which God has not specifically expressed His will in scripture, and which is yet a matter of concern to every believer. This has to do with our experience, not questions of moral right or wrong, but rather, of what to do about problems that arise, whether to buy or rent a house, whether to move to another place, whether to visit a certain place or certain people, whether to buy a certain car, whether or how to help a certain person in need, and many other such things.

There are some who are often very positive in regard to these things, saying, for instance, that they know it is God's will that they go to a certain place. But if scripture does not say so, they do not know this beforehand. Why should they tell others they know it? This is only pride in their supposed powers of discernment. We are warned in James

4:13 that all such boasting as this is evil. Time will prove whether it was God's will or not.

Romans 12:2 is most helpful in giving us a right perception of the will of God: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

Which is better, to know the will of God, or to prove it in experience? Certainly, the latter! But how may we prove it? On the negative side, by not conforming to the world: on the positive side, by being transformed by the renewing of the mind. The world's principles as to wise action are always those of expediency, material benefit, present comfort. If one is offered an attractive job with good salary a long distance from an assembly, he will likely accept it quickly if he is conformed to the world. If he is transformed, he will honestly put the Lord's interests first, for his renewed mind is reasoning from the Lord's viewpoint. Then he will prove the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

This is the vital principle. If our minds are in this way renewed, we shall be accustoming ourselves to learning the Word of God. When learning the will of God in greater things, these lesser things will also find us more discerning as to His will. For as we read it, God's Word will often be realized as applying in certain cases of concern for our instruction and encouragement, especially as our hearts are exercised to learn.

If we must make a rapid decision as to the "yes" or "no" of a certain matter, it is wise to judge ourselves thoroughly so as to be content with either answer. Then lay the matter before the Lord. He may be fully depended on to give calm peace in regard to the decision to make. He may in fact give no peace whatsoever in regard to the opposite decision. Yet even then we should not say we know what the will of the Lord is in reference to the matter; but we may have confidence in Him that He will see that we prove His will in experience.

If a matter gives exercise for some time, the Lord may allow this to keep our souls stirred with some real sense of dependence on His mercy. This calls for constant prayer as well as reading His Word with the matter of exercise in mind. In many cases certain things in the Word

will be so impressed on the heart as to indicate what the will of the Lord may be; and one may therefore be at rest in the calm confidence that the Lord will definitely lead. It is the servant's place of childlike faith.

Let the believer always have this simplicity of confidence that the Lord may be fully depended on to lead him rightly. This is far from bold self-confidence, just as it is far from the impatience that acts in a panic. For God is calm and deliberate in the carrying out of His will, and faith in Him will give quiet calmness too.

If we desire to know the will of God, let us much more desire to do it, and therefore prove the preciousness of it in daily experience.

L. M. Grant.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES!

1. Who is the first nurse to be buried in the Bible?
2. What did the Lord Jesus eat after his resurrection?
3. Who will sing, "O grave, where is thy victory"?

MEAT

"Sanctify them by the truth."

RESURRECTION!

That the Father has been revealed in the Person of the Son, that there is a divine Person on earth, the Holy Spirit, and that there is a Man in heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the essence of Christianity. All blessing for the Christian rests on the great work of redemption accomplished by the Lord Jesus on the cross, but we never could have received the divine blessing procured for us through the death of Jesus apart from His resurrection from among the dead. One of the great truths of Christianity is that there will be the raising from the dead of all who have died. The fundamentalists among the Jews believed in the resurrection of the dead, but it was not until the Son of God came into the world that the truths connected with resurrection were revealed.

The Valley of Dry Bones

Ezekiel beheld in the valley of dry bones an amazing vision, and he was told that it concerned "the whole house of Israel" (Ezekiel 37:11). The dry bones represented the nation of Israel buried among the nations that had led them captive, but the Lord assured the prophet that the time would come when the nation would be restored to the land of Israel. It is not the presentation of the raising of individuals from the dead, a truth clearly taught elsewhere, but rather of the national resurrection of God's people Israel, who, on account of their sins, had been scattered and buried among the nations of the earth.

In Isaiah 18 another aspect of the restoration of Israel to the land of promise is given: there it is not the whole house of Israel, but only a small part of it. Indeed, this is probably what has taken place in our day, when the Israelis have been set up as a nation through the help given by Britain and America. Regarding the restoration of the nation, it is prophesied concerning the individuals, "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). Not all who come back from the captivity among the nations will have divine blessing; for some it will be the judgment of God, as seen in Zechariah 13:8, where only one-third is left.

Prophecies of Christ's Resurrection

There are many types, figures, and prophecies in the Old Testament that bring before us the death and resurrection of Christ: Adam was put into a deep sleep before he received his helpmate; Isaac was laid upon the altar before he was given back as in resurrection; Joseph went into the pit and into the dungeon before he came forth to be the savior of the world; Samson was held in the city of Gaza before rising at midnight to ascend to the top of the hill before Hebron with the doors of the gate of the city upon his shoulders; David went down into the valley of Elah and conquered the giant, bringing back his head and his sword; Benaiah went down into the pit on a snowy day, slew the lion, and came up victorious; Elijah crossed the Jordan and went up to heaven; Elisha crossed with him, then returned to accomplish his mighty works; and Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish before entering upon his mission. These, and many more pictures from the Old Testament Scriptures, bring this great truth before us.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter recalled the prophecy regarding Christ's resurrection in Psalm 16: "Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to Me the ways of life" (Acts 2:27–28). Psalm 110, Isaiah 52 and 53, with many other Scriptures, direct our thoughts to the resurrection of the Son of God. Many of the Old Testament prophecies could not be fulfilled if Christ were not raised. All the glorious Messianic prophecies are based on Christ risen from the dead.

While on earth, the Lord plainly foretold His resurrection, recalling Jonah's three days in the belly of the great fish, and telling His hearers that He would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. He also recalled that which was spoken of Himself in Psalm 110, "Sit thou on My right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool," and said to the Jews when they asked Him for a sign, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). Frequently He told His disciples that He would be crucified and rise again the third day (Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19). Even the enemies of the Lord recalled what He had said about His rising again (Matthew 27:63).

Witness to the Resurrection

How unassailable are the proofs of the resurrection which the apostle Paul presents at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 15. Apart from the apostles, “above five hundred brethren at once” had seen the Lord, most of them alive when the apostle wrote. As to the appearance of Jesus in resurrection to the apostles, Luke wrote, “To whom also He showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days” (Acts 1:3). Among the apostles who saw the Lord alive were Matthew and John, who have written of the resurrection in the Gospels that bear their names. Simon Peter, too, in his First Epistle, writes of “the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God” (1 Peter 3:21–22).

Paul had not known the Lord on earth, yet he saw Him risen from the dead, seated in heaven, even as he writes, “And last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time” (1 Corinthians 15:8). The risen Christ appeared only to chosen witnesses, but He will yet appear to all the nation. Paul anticipated that day, for he too was chosen to be a witness to the risen Christ.

Divine Power Displayed in Resurrection

Divine authority is demonstrated in the Son of Man having judgment committed to Him; but divine power is displayed in resurrection, whether as seen in Christ raising the dead on earth, in His own resurrection, or in the raising of all the dead in the first and final acts of raising the dead. Paul tells us that Jesus is “declared to be the Son of God with power...by the resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4); and that the “exceeding greatness” of God’s power was made known “when He raised Him from the dead” (Ephesians 1:19–20). This was the power seen in raising the daughter of Jairus, the widow of Nain’s son, and Lazarus from death and corruption.

Results of Christ’s Resurrection

Having entered into death, the Son of God came out as the victor, leading “captivity captive” and ascending “up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things” (Ephesians 4:8–10; Colossians 2:15). Through death, the risen Christ annulled “him that had the power of death” (Hebrews 2:14), and “abolished death, and has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10). The risen

Son of Man has said, “I am He that lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” (Revelation 1:18).

All the blessings brought to the saints of God depends upon the death and resurrection of Christ, whether it be justification or salvation (Romans 4:25; 10:9), or all that we enjoy “in Christ” in the heavenly places. Although these blessings were in the counsel of God for us, they have been secured to us through Christ entering into death and rising again. The apostle Peter also brings this before us where he writes, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3).

EXERCISE

"Exercise thyself unto piety"

THE WISDOM FROM ABOVE

“Who is wise and understanding among you; let him show out of a good conversation his works in meekness of wisdom...But the wisdom from above first is pure, then peaceful, gentle, yielding, full of mercy and good fruits, unquestioning, unfeigned” (James 3:13, 17).

“Heaven is our home” we sing in one of our hymns. If that is the case, this should be seen in our lives. That is why James presents to his readers the wisdom from above. We learn in this wonderful epistle how these two worlds, the one from above and the other from beneath, are placed opposite to one another. The challenge is: which world do we promote in our daily lives? Let us study together seven points with regard to this passage.

I. THE SCHOOL OF GOD

My first point is this: as believers we are in the school of God. Do we like being in the school of God? We read in James 1:2, “Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into various temptations.” Are we to be happy when difficulties, trials and afflictions come our way? Yes, they too are instruments for our education as we go through God’s school. It is therefore not surprising when some say, “I don’t like being in God’s school, because of the trials which this involves.” Of course, that depends on how we look at it. Being trained in God’s school, we must understand that God will use various methods for our instruction, of which trials may be but one. There is a remarkable verse that supports this thought: “But we do know that all things work together for good to those who love God,” or to paraphrase it freely, “We know that God makes all things work together for the good of those who love Him” (Romans 8:28).

When we consider the school of God, the idea is that there is a goal in view, and schooling is the means by which we are brought to that goal. This involves:

- teaching or instruction, in order to help the student make progress,
- discipline, so as to draw the student to conformity and

- rewards, for a task well done.

All these together are used to produce a well-balanced, mature, and spiritually intelligent student (disciple), taught in all the principles of God's school and ready to practice what has been communicated.

As James expresses it: The school of God is for lovers of God. This may sound strange, especially if we want to go our own way, yet we are still in God's school and God will deal with us accordingly. Remember what we read about bit and bridle in Psalm 32? It speaks about discipline as being part of the school of God. I encourage you to study the wisdom psalms, of which Psalm 32 is the first. In God's school we start in the first grade and progress onwards. We are all familiar with this principle. We don't begin in the sixth grade. Likewise, Psalm 32 lays down basic matters, like the forgiveness of our sins. It would seem that we enter the school of God the moment we are saved.

I would like to share another point related to this subject. In Isaiah 55:89 we read, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith Jehovah. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts." When we speak about the school of God we not only have to learn certain things, but we also have to "unlearn" other things, because we entered this school with our mind set on our own ways. Therefore, God speaks about His thoughts as being higher than our thoughts and His ways as being different from our ways. That's what we find out in the school of God.

The school of God also implies discipline, even for lovers of God. Perhaps we don't like this word very much, because in our minds it has negative connotations. But really, discipline is positive. It is to draw us. In certain languages, like Dutch and German, we have a word for discipline, and its root refers to this basic thought: to draw. Discipline actually is being drawn: drawn to the Father of lights, drawn to the Lord of glory, drawn to the wisdom from above, drawn through the Holy Spirit who is in control (James 4). That is God's principle of discipline. Now if we follow our own ways, God sometimes has to deal with us in a harsh manner, in order to remove hindrances and obstacles. He has to stop us, sometimes to force us, although He doesn't like to do so. God

acts according to the principle of attraction, but at times He has to correct us or to punish us in His governmental dealings (Galatians 6).

There was only one in the school of God (Isaiah 50 speaks about Him as being a disciple) who never needed correction. He was a true Son in God's school. He was a real student, a real disciple, but He never needed to be disciplined, unlike you and me who need correction, and I use this word discipline in a broad sense. On the one hand this suggests that we are disciples, that we are followers of the Lord Jesus, that we are drawn to a Divine Person. On the other hand, it implies the thought of correction, when necessary. In Hebrews 12 we see that He chastises or disciplines whom He loves. Discipline will be exercised by the hand of one who loves us. This also is part of the school of God.

2. WISDOM AND DISCIPLESHIP IN GOD'S SCHOOL

The second point is "wisdom." In Job 28, Job speaks about the wisdom of God that can be learned. He concludes: "Lo, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." In James we read a lot more about wisdom, first in chapter 1:5. We all need wisdom, and we can go without hesitation to Him who gives freely. If we ask our God, He will give to us without reproach. Does wisdom not speak of God's unlimited resources?

What then is wisdom? As we find in Proverbs, it means knowledge that is applied in the right way as well as at the right time. We may already have a certain understanding of God's principles, which is good, but how do we apply these principles? Putting into practice God's thoughts needs real dependence as expressed in a consistent prayer life. That's why we should go to the Lord and ask for wisdom to know what to do in specific cases, in certain circumstances, and at the right time. This is wisdom. We could put the so-called Sermon on the Mount alongside James. In Matthew 5-7 the Lord gives much teaching for disciples. This is not theoretical. Read these chapters and see how practical the teachings of the Lord are. Then also read the books of Proverbs and Psalms. In these wisdom books you'll learn very practical things. And that is what James wants to share with us: heavenly wisdom. Of course, there is an extra dimension to it, because James refers to what we see in the life of our Lord Jesus.

We could connect with this the need for discipleship. This is a way of life which responds practically to God's wisdom. In the school of God

there are disciples, learners and pupils who put these teachings into practice, by following the Lord Jesus. A disciple is always a learner. This brings us to the third point which is:

3. THE TEACHER IN GOD'S SCHOOL

Who is the teacher? It is our blessed Lord! Did we not notice earlier with regard to His life on earth, how He has been a learner? He was always at God's feet. When we think of Mary, we see her on several occasions at the feet of the Lord Jesus. But do we realize that the Lord Himself was found at God's feet? His Father would instruct Him morning by morning. Now let us examine this important point: the great Teacher was first the great Learner. Don't we often think that after a prescribed period of training, we have learned enough? Then we stop learning and start to rely on ourselves, instead of listening to God's voice. We also think we can tell others what to do. Obviously, that is a great mistake. In God's school we are always learners. Therefore, we will go on learning, even if we live to be eighty-five or ninety years old. We will learn new lessons in the school of God. As long as we are on earth we will not be finished. Until the rapture we will continue to be learners in order to put into practice what we have learned. This harmony between learning and doing would open the door to teach others. To the extent that we have learned our lessons, we can communicate what we have learned to others. Thus the Teacher would use us.

Another verse comes to mind, where the Lord says, "Come unto me." Perhaps you think of this only as the message of the gospel. But it is also for us as believers to respond when He says, "Come unto Me," whatever the circumstances in which we are found. Even if you forget all about my seven points, you should keep this thought before you: The Lord Jesus has said "come unto Me and you will receive what you need." Go to Him with all your burdens. Even little children and young people sometimes have terrible burdens. The question is, to whom do you go? "Come unto Me" is really an invitation.

However, the Teacher adds something to it: "Take My yoke upon you." Are we willing to take His yoke upon our shoulders? That would mean identifying ourselves with a Master who is rejected in this world! Don't forget for one moment that we have associated ourselves with a rejected Lord, with a rejected Messiah, with a rejected Christ (see the

context of Matthew 11 and 12). But how blessed it is when we can take His yoke.

What does it mean to take His yoke? It means that we are going to be subject to God's will in the same way that He was subject to God's will. Let us not think that this is for the sisters only, who are to be submissive to their husbands. It is up to all believers to be subject to God's will. We learn this in the school of God. There we have great privileges as well as responsibilities. It is there that we meet a wonderful Companion, even the One who says, "Take My yoke upon you." This implies that He carries that yoke thus. That is real companionship. When I am subject to the will of God He says: you are My brother and sister and mother (Matthew 12:48, 50). It is the one who does the will of God and who takes this yoke upon his shoulders, to whom the Teacher says: You are My friend. Then we will have the greatest of all friends as our companion. What is the measure and standard in God's school? It is enough for a disciple to become as the teacher. It is enough for the bondman to become as his Lord, the teacher. Too high? This is what the Teacher and Lord has in mind for disciples (Matthew 10:24–25).

Then He adds: "Learn from Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart." This is the only right attitude: submissiveness, meekness. Do we not get easily offended? A brother or a sister says something which is perhaps not entirely right, and we get offended, or we may do something and someone else gets offended. This is not meekness. Meekness does not give and does not take offence. This is what we learn in the school of God, in the company of this amazing teacher and companion. Because:

4. THE TEACHER IS OUR EXAMPLE AND MODEL

The Lord Jesus not only tells us what we should do; He is what we should be and do. He is what He says. In John 8:25 He says He is "altogether that which I also say to you" and thus He is the living expression of His teachings. Here is where we fall short. In James 1 it is said: "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only." This is our problem. We like to hear, we like to study, but what about our practice? The Lord Jesus put into practice the things He taught. Therefore, He is a perfect example. He attracts us so much. He not only says do this, do

that and don't do that. He teaches in such a way that we love to follow Him. So, He is our model.

We may link this with the beginning of James 3 where we find that the tongue leads in a certain direction, just as the rudder steers the ship or the animal is controlled by bit and bridle. Thus we see in the Lord Jesus an Example for us. He leads us in the right direction. I like to link this with James 3:11, where he mentions the fountain of water. When we are in the company of the Lord Jesus, we will be blessed. Learning from His example, we will be encouraged, we will be refreshed, and like these fountains produce sweet water to drink. James also uses the example of a tree which produces fruits. When we are in His company, we will produce the right fruit. Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17 and many other passages show us how we can learn from His example. The fruit of righteousness (James 3:18) and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) link themselves with the fruit of holiness, which we have seen earlier (Hebrews 12).

5. PROGRESS AND MATURITY

This point is directly connected with what we have seen already. James' exercise was to help his brethren grow up to spiritual maturity. Many of our problems arise and develop because we are spiritually immature. Perhaps we have learnt a lot as "head" knowledge, but we do not put it into practice. That is a form of immaturity. Fights, conflicts and speaking against one another, are all different forms of spiritual immaturity. Our Lord, who is the divine Teacher, wants to take us through another class in His school. He takes us to His side and then teaches us, that we may grow towards maturity.

James puts two worlds opposite to one another. To which of these two worlds do we belong? Either we belong to God's world, to the Father of lights, to the Lord of Glory, to the wisdom from above, or we are subjects of Satan's world. In chapter 3 he puts both wills beside one another and he shows;

- firstly, the difference in origins,
- secondly, the difference in the methods used, and
- thirdly, on the positive side, the results in spiritual growth and maturity.

Growth can involve what is painful. Even in the natural realm, when children grow up and reach puberty, this time of growth may be a painful process. Those who are older will remember these painful experiences. This is another aspect we find in James 3, where growth will involve a purification process in God's school. Some other passages may help us to understand why this is so. In Luke 9, on the Mount of Transfiguration, we read how the Lord's face was changed before His disciples. This is an illustration of how the disciple will change in the school of God. In Malachi 3 we find the Lord seated as a gold or silversmith. He would purify the precious metals to remove the unclean elements, till He can see His own face reflected in the gold and silver. That is what happens in the school of God. The Lord is there to deal with us. He wants to help us grow, but He has to remove the obstacles. He has to remove the elements mixed with the gold and the silver that are not good. This testing and purification process is part of God's school.

The testing in James 1 is to show that there is good material present but, at the same time, this is a painful process because the elements which are not good have to be removed. For example, self-will has to be judged and arrogance has to be dealt with. There has to be an attitude of true repentance. The Lord gradually removes these negative elements, and He does it with divine wisdom and care, never forgetting the purpose He has in view: our "growth." This purifying and refining process is part of growing up. He uses trials and tribulations. Although it is not pleasant, the end is very positive. He will not be satisfied until this glorious result has been achieved. Thus it is that He leads us to maturity.

6. CHRIST REPRODUCED IN HIS OWN

We have arrived at the sixth point: the final result of this formation and purification process. The objective is not only spiritual growth in itself, which is very important, but rather what we read in verse 17: "the wisdom from above is pure, peaceful, gentle." That is Christ Himself, but reproduced in you and me. Although "heaven is our home", heaven is also right here, seen in you and me. Christ wants to display Himself in you and me. The Lord is rejected in this world, but now He wants to use believers, that they may display Him. In this way we may be His witnesses, His disciples, showing Him forth as this heavenly wisdom in its seven beautiful features. These seven points concerning the

heavenly wisdom are put over against seven points of the devilish wisdom. Comparing them, you can see the two different origins, the two different messages and the two different results. On the positive side the final result is that His character is reproduced in you and me. That is what God, the Father of lights, wants to obtain. You call yourself a Christian? Then God says: I want to see Christ in you and nothing else. And this is what the Holy Spirit would produce (Galatians 5:23; Philippians 4:8). He will produce these fruits: Christ in you and me. Results towards God, results towards men and also a change as to ourselves. His features will be reproduced.

7. WHO IS WISE?

Why is this so important? Because we are living in the closing days of this dispensation, and God is looking for wise men even at the very end. Think of Daniel and his friends, who were wise in days of great change and trial. Think of the future remnant among the Jews, who will have acquired special wisdom in God's school. But now it is for us to learn wisdom in God's school. There are four elements connected with this question, which we find in four different Scriptures.

1. Psalm 107:43: Wisdom is based on redemption and is acquired in submission to God's ways (see the whole Psalm).
2. Jeremiah 9:12: Wisdom understands God's dealings with His own people in judgment. The prophet Jeremiah was not only well taught, but he also submitted himself to God's thoughts.
3. Hosea 14:9: Wisdom understands God's principles and the rightness of His ways in dealing with His people. Who is wise? Who will take these things at heart?
4. This fits in with James 3:14–17, where we are at the end of the Jewish "economy" (before the destruction of the temple), which is an illustration of the end of the present dispensation. Compare also Revelation 13:18 for those who will go through the Great Tribulation: "Here is wisdom."

It is because we are at the end of the present dispensation that we have the special privilege of learning more about the ways of God. James encourages his readers to become familiar with the wisdom of God, because this is much needed by those who are living in a mixed condition of things. Matters are becoming increasingly difficult to such an extent that often we have no idea what to do. So who is wise amongst

us? Let us learn here in the school of God. We are living in very dark days, but the more we study in the school of God, the more we will be conformed to our blessed Lord and the better we will shine for Him.

We read about the Father of lights. He wants us to be shining as lights. Especially in our days it is very important to focus our attention on the Lord, who is the Sun of righteousness and we, believers, are like planets turning in orbit around Him. He is the very center, the Lord Jesus, the Son of God. He is the Sun and we are attracted by His glory, so that we can reflect His light in various ways in the dark world where we live. May the Lord help us.

Alfred E. Bouter

ANSWERS TO SCRIPTURE SEARCH!

1. Deborah, Rebekah's nurse (Genesis 35:8)
2. Fish and honey (Luke 24:42)
3. The believers at the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:55)

REST

"Shall I not seek rest for thee that it may be well with thee?"

"BESIDE THE STILL WATERS"

"He leadeth me beside the still waters" (Psalm 23).

The souls of men are restless, sin has made them so, for "the wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest." But the Good Shepherd calls His sheep from their restless wandering and unsatisfied self-willed straying and brings them to repose at His feet. He leads them beside the waters of quietness.

The simile brings a picture of peace to the vision; it speaks of restfulness of heart in a secure retreat. But it does not follow that this quietness of soul springs from external circumstances—these may be most adverse to our natural inclination—yet in the midst of them the heart may be unruffled, as another Scripture says: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee."

One soul-enthraling incident in the life of our Lord on earth illustrates this quietness and peace to perfection. At the bidding of their Master the fishermen-disciples had launched their craft upon as still a sea as ever the sun shone upon. But they had scarce set their oars to the rowlocks when the wind rose and gradually increased until it blew a terrific gale, the very fury of hell seemed to be let loose in that tempest, and the waves roared and rolled about that one small boat with such force that those well-seasoned mariners were seized with a panic of fear. The raging of the waters without the boat created so great a storm of terror within their breasts that they cried aloud to their Master that they would perish. But what of Him? Was He afraid? Did any anxiety of heart show itself in His manner? Nay,

"His head was on a pillow laid,
And He was fast asleep."

Perfect peace, in the midst of the tempest! Blessed repose in the presence of the threatening waves! Why did they not share His pillow? Had that storm increased in its fury sevenfold they would still have

been safe, yea, safe as when at His command a great calm laid its arresting hand upon the turbulent waves.

But what was the secret of that wonderful repose? Upon what pillow did the Lord put down His head? The secret was unbroken confidence in God; the pillow was His Father's changeless and almighty love. He was the Man of absolute dependence, more than man, as we shall see, but truly man, committing all His way to God and satisfied to do His will alone. And the God whom He served was behind every circumstance; He sat above the water-flood and put a strong bridle on the mouth of the storm. It could not rage beyond His permission, His love would keep His loved One in all His ways, and the ever blessed and absolutely dependent Jesus rested there. And, Christian, He gives that pillow to you, so that you may find repose in the midst of trouble, He says, "The Father Himself loveth you because ye have loved Me." "My peace I give unto you...not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). This is a great reality—"He leadeth me beside the still waters." The raging flood without, but the quiet waters within.

The fear of those disciples brought forth an evidence of the divine power of the Lord, a gleam of His Godhead glory. With tender compassion in His heart for their weakness, with the quiet of an eternal calm in His eyes, and with omnipotence in the words of His mouth, He spoke to the storm; and the great billows fell at His feet in mute submission as cowers a spaniel at the feet of his master.

The disciples marveled at that mighty act, and, indeed, it was wonderful; but which of the two demands our deepest admiration, the peace in the tempest, or the power over it?

The former may even be ours, for the latter is always on our side, to be used for us when immortal love sees that the storm has taught us the needed lesson. But it is a greater thing to go through the storm resting in perfect confidence in Him than to have it removed for us. It is more to His honor when we allow ourselves to be led by the still waters while the floods roll about us, than to have circumstances changed to suit our lack of faith.

"Carest Thou not that we perish?" cried His disciples. Strange words from their mouths, revealing their distrust of Him. How little they knew

Him! I wonder if Simon Peter remembered this faithless cry when years after he wrote to his brethren who were being greatly tried and persecuted, "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you." Yes, He cares, and Simon Peter had proved it, and so have we, and so we shall still prove it, not because we have faith, but because He is faithful.

Christians, let us trust in the Lord at all times; let us recline upon His bosom, and believe that He will not permit a single circumstance, or place us in any situation which will not further in our souls the purposes of His changeless love. So shall we be led by the waters of quietness. And though in the world we shall have tribulation, yet in Him we shall have peace.

J. T. Mawson

“THE NEW NORMAL”

My printer has been “acting up.” Eventually I will have to buy a new one, but for now shutting it down and unplugging it seems to clear the problem and resets it. Like many of you, I wish the year 2020 had a reset button. Between the Covid-19 pandemic, riots, fires, storms, and general uncertainty, 2020 has been a year we would all rather forget.

One phrase from 2020 has crept into our vocabulary, and it may be around for a while in 2021. That phrase is, “The New Normal.”

HOW ARE YOU HANDLING “THE NEW NORMAL”?

Three things have helped me to navigate “The New Normal,” and I hope they help you, too. Those three things are:

1. Knowing that God Never Changes
2. Knowing that God’s Word is True
3. Knowing that God’s Promises Will Never Fail

GOD NEVER CHANGES—HE IS MERCIFUL

Even in “The New Normal” God never changes. He is merciful. Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, was written around 430 BC. At that time, many Jewish people had returned to Judea from captivity and were busy rebuilding their shattered lives. But at the same time, they were dishonoring God. They continued to worship Him, but that worship was cold, formal, and insincere. They offered the sacrifices required by the Law but gave God their worst—their leftovers and cast-offs.

In response God said, “offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person?” (Malachi 1:8). The people deserved to be punished severely, but God showed them mercy. In Malachi 3:6, He declared, “I am the Lord, I change not; therefore, ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.”

GOD’S WORD IS TRUE—IT IS TRUSTWORTHY

Even in “The New Normal,” God’s Word, the Bible, is true. It is trustworthy. In 1776 Voltaire, the French Philosopher, arrogantly declared, “One hundred years from my day there will not be a Bible upon earth except one that is looked upon by an antiquarian curiosity seeker.” Voltaire died in 1778. Fifty years later his house in Geneva, Switzerland, was being used by the Evangelical Society of Geneva as a warehouse and distribution center for Bibles and religious tracts.

The Bible is an ancient book, but it is not an outdated one. Millions still find peace, comfort, correction, and direction in the Bible because it speaks clearly to the issues of today—the issues of life.

Psalm 119 has been called “The Song of the Book.” Nearly every verse of this magnificent Psalm speaks of the Scriptures themselves—God’s “law,” God’s “testimonies,” God’s “precepts,” God’s “statutes,” God’s “commandments,” God’s “judgments,” etc. Psalm 119:89 declares, “For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.”

GOD’S PROMISES WILL NEVER FAIL—HE WILL KEEP THEM ALL

Even in “The New Normal” God’s promises will not fail. He will keep every one of them. The Bible is full of “exceeding great and precious promises” (2 Peter 1:4).

- Promises of Forgiveness: “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:7).
- Promises of Cleansing: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18).
- Promises of Renewal: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- Promises of Relationship: “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12).

Navigating “The New Normal” may be challenging. But my hope is not in the return to the way things used to be pre-2020. My hope is in a Person, my Savior, Jesus Christ. Is He your Savior too, or do you just know about Him? Listen to His words in Matthew 11:28, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Turn to Christ—come to Him today. Admit your sin, humbly ask Him to save you and He will.

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