

BIBLICAL INSIGHT ARTICLES by Tassos Kioulachoglou

The enemy, the battle and the winners

I believe very few people like to hear about wars, battles and enemies. Yet, we will all agree that when they exist the worse that one can do is to ignore them and live with the illusion of their supposed non-existence. The Word of God also makes reference to an enemy called devil and to a fight that is taking place against him. Moreover, it by no means suggests ignorance of him and his techniques. Really, as II Corinthians 2:10-11 says:

II Corinthians 2:10-11 - "lest Satan should take advantage of us; **for we are not ignorant of his devices.**"

If someone suggests ignorance of the devil and his devices this is certainly not the one true God, for for Him we are to be «NO ignorant». Taking this as a point of departure, we will try in the next to explore some of the things that the Word says about the enemy, the fight and how we can stand in it.

1. The two powers

The fact of the existence of two opposite powers that are in action today, is evident from Colossians 1:12-14 where, speaking of Christians, it says:

Colossians 1:13-14 - «He [the Father] has delivered us FROM THE POWER OF DARKNESS AND CONVEYED US INTO THE KINGDOM OF THE SON OF HIS LOVE»

Also in Acts 26:17-18 Jesus Christ, speaking to Paul about his mission, said:

Acts 26:17-18 - «I will deliver you from the people, as well as *from* the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, TO OPEN THEIR EYES, IN ORDER TO TURN THEM FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT, AND FROM THE POWER OF SATAN TO GOD, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in me»

And Ephesians 5:8 speaking again of us tells us:

Ephesians 5:8 - «For **you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord**»

As it can be seen by all these passages, we were once «darkness» (Ephesians 5:8) and under «the power of Satan» (Acts 26:17). However, when we heard the Word of God regarding Jesus Christ and believed it, we were conveyed «from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God» (Acts 26:17). A summary of both our old and new state is given in Ephesians 2:1-9, where starting from our past state, we read:

Ephesians 2:1-3 - «And you.....were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now is working in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.»

That's really a very bad state, yet it is not our present state, as for the latter we read:

Ephesians 2:4-9

«BUT GOD, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourself; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.»

All we were once under the dominion and influence of the spirit "who now works in the sons of disobedience" i.e. the devil. All we were once darkness. Yet, we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and in his resurrection and this faith saved us (Romans 10:9). God, from dead that we were before, MADE US ALIVE and RAISED US UP TOGETHER with Christ. However, where are all the other people that have not yet believed? There, where we used to be: i.e. in darkness and under the power of Satan. As II Corinthians 4:3-4 says:

II Corinthians 4:3-4

«But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them»

Who is the god of this age who blinds people so that they may not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ? Obviously the one that had blinded us also i.e. the devil.

Moreover, II Timothy 2:25-26 says:

«in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and *that* they may come to their senses *and escape* the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to *do* his will»

We used to be in that state also, but we are no more. We were delivered by God and were transferred from «darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God». Nevertheless, this does not mean that we no longer have dealings with the devil, as God and the devil are enemies to each other and there is a war between them and a battle we have to fight.

2. The battle

The battle we are speaking about, is described in Ephesians 6:10-18 where, starting from verses 10-12, we read:

Ephesians 6:10-12

«Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.»

As it can be seen, there is a wrestling, a fight that is going on between us and the devil and his camp. It is not a fight against flesh and blood, i.e. against human beings, but against principalities and powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness and the wicked spirits in the heavenly places. Fortunately, in this spiritual fight we are not unprotected, as

God has provided us with a panoply that if we put on we will be able to fight successfully. Verses¹ 13-18 give us a detailed description of it:

Ephesians 6:13-18

«Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints»

See that the armor is not ours. It is the «armor OF GOD». It is something that He has provided to enable us to fight the spiritual battle successfully. Therefore, what is required from us is not to make the armor but to simply take it up. If we do this, it is promised that we will «be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand».

More information about the spiritual battle and especially about the weapons that God has given us to fight it, is found in II Corinthians 10:3-5. There it says:

II Corinthians 10:3-5

«For though we walk in the flesh, WE DO NOT WAR ACCORDING TO THE FLESH. FOR THE WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE ARE NOT CARNAL BUT MIGHTY IN GOD FOR PULLING DOWN STRONGHOLDS, CASTING DOWN THOUGHTS AND EVERY HIGH THING THAT EXALTS ITSELF AGAINST THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.»

Again we are told of a warfare, which is not a carnal one and of weapons that are not carnal weapons. If the warfare is not carnal this means that it is spiritual, thus the warfare of Ephesians 6. There we read about the panoply that God has given us to put on and stand against the wiles of the devil. Here we learn that the weapons that God has given us for this spiritual warfare are not carnal «but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down thoughts and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.".

Therefore, one way or another the conclusion from the above passages is that there is a fight that is not carnal but spiritual. This is a fact that cannot be altered. It is the truth that God has declared in His Word for our benefit. Either we like it or not, it is the truth. Either we fight the fight or not, it is the truth. The only that is dependant on us is the result of the fight as we can either ignore it and not put on the armor of God, in which case we will be devoured by the enemy (I Peter 5:8-9), or we will put it on and resist him in which case we will be able to stand successfully.

3. Persecution, tribulation and deliverance

Having seen the spiritual battle we have to fight, let's now move ahead and see some of the things that this fight may imply for us in practice. For it is evident that since we are in

¹ For more about this panoply, see Biblical Insights, Vol.1, Issue 7, July 1996.

a fight with the devil this may imply some actions taken from his part. Starting therefore from John 15:18-21, we read:

John 15:18-21

«[Jesus is speaking to the disciples] If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before *it hated* you. If you were **of the world**, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not **of the world**, but I chose you out **of the world**, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, «A servant is not greater than his master.» IF THEY PERSECUTED ME, THEY WILL ALSO PERSECUTE YOU. If they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for my name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent me»

As it can be seen it is one thing to be «in the world» and another thing to be «**of the world**». This is evident from the fact that though in John 17:11 the disciples, and we by extension, are described as «in the world», here we are told that we are not «of the world». The difference is really great, as those «of the world» have an entirely different ruler than those that are not «of the world» i.e. us. Who is the one that rules those «of the world»? We can see it in John 14:30 where Jesus, speaking to his disciples, said²:

John 14:30

"I will no longer talk much with you, for **the ruler of this world** is coming and he has nothing in me"

Also I John 5:19 says:

«We know that we are of God, **and the whole world lies IN THE WICKED ONE**»

We, Christians, are of GOD. He is our RULER, our **LORD**. However, he is not «the ruler of this world». In contrast, as the text says, the whole world lies in THE WICKED ONE i.e. the devil, the «god of this age» of II Corinthians 4:3 and «the ruler of this world» of John 14:30. This is the reason that Jesus Christ warns us about persecution from the world. Some of the world kept his word and followed him. Others denied it and persecuted him. It's the same today as well. Some, like us, will hear the Word of God, will believe it and will be conveyed «from the power of Satan to God», while others will deny it and may persecute us³. However, the fact that we may be persecuted does not mean that we should lose our courage. As Jesus said in John 16:33:

John 16:33

«These things I have spoken to you, that in me you may have peace. IN THE WORLD YOU WILL HAVE TRIBULATION; BUT BE OF GOOD CHEER, I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD»

Jesus Christ very straightly tells us that in the world we will have tribulation. However, he does not stop there but encourages us to «be of good cheer» for he has

² See also John 12:31, 16:11.

³ Here it should be noted that persecution may come not only from the world but also from people that though God's now, continue to walk with the flesh (the old nature), the works of which are described in detail in Galatians 5:19-21.

overcome the world. And not only that, but he, the one that overcame the world, Jesus Christ the Lord, is in us now. Really Colossians 1:27 tells us:

Colossians 1:27

«To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is CHRIST IN YOU, the hope of glory.»

Also II Corinthians 13:5 says in the form of a question:

«Do you not know yourselves, that JESUS CHRIST IS IN YOU?»

Christ, the one that overcame the world, is in you NOW. As I John 4:4 says:

I John 4:4

«You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, BECAUSE HE WHO IS IN YOU IS GREATER THAN HE WHO IS IN THE WORLD»

Greater is the one that is in you than the one that is in the world: the devil. Of course there will be persecution and tribulation. The Word is very clear on this. Yet, it will not stop there, but there will also be deliverance from the Lord. As Paul said in II Timothy 3:10-12, giving his personal witness:

II Timothy 3:10-12

«But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, PERSECUTIONS, AFFLICTIONS, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra - what persecutions I endured. AND OUT OF *THEM* ALL THE LORD DELIVERED ME. YES, AND ALL WHO DESIRE TO LIVE GODLY IN CHRIST JESUS WILL SUFFER PERSECUTION.»

Who says that because we are Christians we will have no persecution? Certainly not the Word, for here it is before our eyes: «all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution». Therefore, let's not be miserable if it happens to face persecution, for persecution is risen against those that walk with God and «desire to live godly in Christ Jesus». This of course does not mean that all that we will have in life will be persecutions. Paul suffered much tribulation and many persecutions, but as he says: «AND OUT OF THEM ALL THE LORD DELIVERED ME». Persecution is only the one side of the coin. The other is deliverance from the Lord. As Paul again witnesses few verses later:

II Timothy 4:16-18

«At my first defense NO ONE STOOD WITH ME, BUT ALL FORSOOK ME. May it not be charged against them. BUT THE LORD STOOD WITH ME AND STRENGTHEN ME, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear. Also I WAS DELIVERED out of the mouth of the lion. AND THE LORD WILL DELIVER ME FROM EVERY EVIL WORK AND PRESERVE *ME* FOR HIS HEAVENLY KINGDOM. To Him *be* the glory for ever and ever»

The normal is that all the family, all the church of God⁴ stands with you and you stand with all. Unfortunately, as the Word shows here, this may not happen, as it depends on whether each member of the family walks with the spirit (the new nature) or with the flesh

⁴ Paul speaks for people of the church here. The world was never with him to abandon him.

(the old nature). In our case, all flew away from Paul. A man that had worked so hard, so committed, for God serving His people, strengthening them and making known to them the Word of God, was forsaken by all save one: the LORD who was the only one that stood with him. And really He is the only one that we should assuredly expect to stand faithfully with us, as He promises it in Hebrews 13:5-6:

Hebrews 13:5-6

«I will NEVER leave you nor forsake you. So we may boldly say: «The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?»»

All the others may forsake you. All may leave you. Yet the Lord will NEVER leave you but He will always deliver you as you stand for Him. As Paul boldly said: «AND THE LORD WILL DELIVER ME FROM EVERY EVIL WORK AND PRESERVE ME FOR HIS HEAVENLY KINGDOM». Also, as we read in Romans 8:35-36:

Romans 8:35-36

«Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword? As it is written: «for your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.» Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.»

Does the last phrase of the above passage say that there will be no tribulation? NO, what it says is that **IN** TRIBULATION we will be more than conquerors. The same with the others as well: Famine, nakedness, persecution, sword etc. Who says that all these will not happen because we are Christians? Certainly not the Word. For what the Word says is that «**IN** ALL THESE THINGS [which means that they may come our way] we will be more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

Closing therefore: there is a spiritual battle we have to fight. In this battle we are not unprotected but we have the armor of God, the spiritual weapons of God the only appropriate for this battle. Also we have a God that is greater than anyone else and is specialized to deliver and take us out from the traps and the temptations of the enemy. If the ruler of this world rises persecution against you, do not marvel. It is absolutely natural and means that his kingdom has problems with you. Stay faithful in the difficulty to God for as II Peter 2:9 says: «THE LORD KNOWS HOW TO DELIVER THE GODLY OUT OF TEMPTATIONS⁵».

⁵Putting II Timothy 3:2 side by side with II Peter 2:9, we have a complete picture regarding the persecution against the godly. Thus: II Timothy 3:12 tells us «and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution». That's the devil's job: persecution. On the other hand II Peter 2:9 says: «THE LORD KNOWS HOW TO DELIVER THE GODLY OUT OF TEMPTATIONS». That's God's job: DELIVERANCE.

Lusts, temptation and sin

As the title shows, this issue is about temptation and how it may affect -if it succeeds at what it aims - our relationship with God. We are not going to cover everything about temptation, as this would require more than one issue. Instead, we will be concentrated on the well known passage of James 1:14-15, documenting what is said there with four examples from the Word.

1. The tempter

Since we speak about temptation, it would be good to first introduce the one that is mainly involved in it, and who for this reason is called «the tempter». Thus going to Matthew 4:3, we read:

Matthew 4:3

«Now when THE TEMPTER came to him [Jesus], he said, If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread»

What is recorded in the above passage, belongs to the temptations that Jesus suffered in the wilderness. The one that was tempting him was the devil, who for this reason is called «the tempter». This title is also used for him in I Thessalonians 3:5, where it says:

I Thessalonians 3:5

«when I [Paul] could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means THE TEMPTER HAD TEMPTED YOU, and our labor might be in vain»

The tempter's job is to tempt, to try, so that to make the one that is tried to fall. As it is evident from the above, the one that does this is the devil.

2. James 1:14-15

Having introduced the tempter, let's now move to the central passage of our article i.e. to James 1:14-15. There it says:

James 1:14-15

«**But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lusts and enticed.** Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin when it is fully grown, brings forth death»

(KJV-NKJV)

Regarding the word «lusts», this is the plural of the Greek noun «ἐπιθυμία» (*epithumia*) that occurs 38 times in the New Testament and it is translated (KJV) 32 times as «lust», 3 times as «concupiscence» and 3 times as «desire». Apart from the three times that is translated as «desire», in all the other cases it is used with the meaning of a lust of the flesh, a lust of the old man, a sinful desire, therefore, a desire that is contrary to God and His will. That the lusts of the flesh are not at all pleasant to God, is evident from Romans 8:5-8, where we read:

Romans 8:5-8

«For those who live according to the flesh [old nature] set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those *who live* according to the spirit [new nature], the things of the spirit. For to be carnally minded *is* DEATH, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. **Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God**»

The carnal mind that is enmity against God of course includes the desires of the old nature as well. It is for such desires that James 1:14-15 speaks about. He is not referring to the desires of the new man, for these desires are very pleasant to God and cannot lead to temptation.

Regarding now the phrase «but each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lusts and enticed», this does not mean that a temptation is born only as a result of desires of the old nature nor it also means that every time that someone is tempted, he will necessarily be drawn away and sin. That such a view of the above passage cannot be correct, is evident by the fact that Jesus Christ «**WAS IN ALL TEMPTED AS WE ARE, YET WITHOUT SIN**» (Hebrews 4:15). Was Jesus tempted because he was drawn away by lusts of the flesh? If he was drawn away, he would have sinned. But he neither was drawn away, nor he sinned, though he was tempted IN ALL. What therefore James 1:14-15 tells us is not so much how a temptation is born, but how it obtains its purpose (sin). Temptation is always (implicitly or explicitly) a work of the tempter, the devil, and it will obtain its purpose (sin), if we are drawn away and enticed by the lusts of the old man, so that to go after them, fulfill them, and sin.

Perhaps a better understanding of the above, may be achieved by some examples from the Bible. In the next, we will examine four such examples, starting from I Timothy 6:9.

2.1. I Timothy 6:9

There it says:

I Timothy 6:9

«But **those who DESIRE to be rich fall into temptation** and a snare, and *in* many foolish and harmful lusts [*epithumies*] which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of

money is a root of all evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows»

We saw that temptation attains its goal (sin), when one is drawn away and enticed by the lusts of the old nature. As it can be seen, one such lust is also the lust to be rich, that according to the above passage, leads to temptation, to other harmful lusts, and at the end to destruction. We can conclude therefore, that to desire to be rich is NOT the will of God, but will of the FLESH⁶.

This of course does not mean that God does not want us to lay up treasures. However the treasures He wants us to lay up are not on earth but in HEAVEN. As Jesus Christ said:

Matthew 6:19-21, 24-25

«DO NOT lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; BUT LAY UP for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. FOR WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS, THERE YOUR HEART WILL BE ALSO.....No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. YOU CANNOT SERVE GOD AND MAMMON [it is an Aramaic word that means «riches»]

It is impossible to serve both God and riches. You will either choose to serve riches, in which case you may wonder after sometime, what happened to the Word that once sounded so sweet to your heart (Matthew 13:22), or you will choose to serve God in which case you will have your needs covered abundantly (Philippians 4:19, Matthew 6:25-34) and a great eternal treasure waiting for you in heaven.

2.2. Eve and the snake

Another example where we see the devil working deception and enticement so that to make the one that is tempted to do things contrary to God's will, is in Genesis 3. In Genesis 2 God had commanded the man that «of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die» (Genesis 2:16-17). Therefore, Adam and Eve knew that it was not God's will to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But Genesis 3:1-5 tells us:

Genesis 3:1-5

«Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, «Has God indeed said, «You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?» And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God has said, «You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.» Then the serpent said to the woman, «You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be as gods, knowing good and evil».

(NKJV-KJV)

⁶Regarding the material possessions with which one should be content, I Timothy 6:6-8 tells us: «For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And **HAVING FOOD AND CLOTHING, WITH THESE WE SHALL BE CONTENT**»

Temptation is always a work of the devil, «the tempter», and here we see him working his profession very well. Thus, he first challenges with a question what God had said. Then, seeing the woman's reaction, he moves to a complete disagreement with the Word of God, promising to her that if they ate, they would become as gods, knowing good and evil. But, obviously, he was deceiving her. As II Corinthians 11:3, tells us:

II Corinthians 11:3
«the serpent DECEIVED Eve by his craftiness»

Also I Timothy 2:14 says:
«the woman BEING DECEIVED, FELL INTO TRANSGRESSION»

Comparing the temptations of the Lord Jesus Christ recorded in Matthew 4:1-11 with the temptation of Eve here, we can see that in both cases the devil first tried to deceive them. Really, when for example he promised to Jesus that «All these things [all the kingdoms of the world and their glory (Matthew 4:8)] I will give you if you will fall down and worship me» (Matthew 4:9) he was obviously trying to deceive⁷ him. Yet he blatantly FAILED. As Matthew 4:10 tells us, regarding this temptation:

Matthew 4:10
«Then Jesus said to him, «Away with you, Satan! For IT IS WRITTEN, «You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.»

Jesus was NOT deceived. Had he been deceived, he would have walked against the will of God (the «written» of the above passage) and he would have sinned. But as the Word says: he «was in all points tempted as *we are*, **YET WITHOUT SIN**» (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus was not deceived but he ADHERED to the Word of God. As a result the devil, seeing that his attempts were unsuccessful, left him (Matthew 4:11). On the contrary, Eve, being enticed and deceived by the adversary, NEGLECTED the word of God and...

Genesis 3:6
«when she SAW that the tree *was* good for food, that it *was* PLEASANT TO THE EYES, and a tree DESIRABLE to make *one* wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate»

Being stimulated by the devil, the woman disregarded the Word of God, was drawn away following her senses⁸, and as a result she (and her husband) sinned and died⁹.

2.3 David's numbering

⁷ I.e. to draw him away from the truth, «the written».

⁸ That's why such phrases as: «she saw», «it was pleasant to the eyes», «it was desirable».

⁹ For this death, see: Biblical Insights, Vol.1, Issue 5, May 1996.

Another example where we see the devil moving someone to act contrary to God's will, is in I Chronicles 21. There, starting from verse 1 we read:

I Chronicles 21:1-4

«Now **Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel**. So David said to Joab and to the leaders of the people. «Go, number Israel from Beersheba to Dan, and bring the number of them to me that I may know *it*.» And Joab answered, «May the Lord make His people a hundred times more than they are. But my lord the king, *are* they not all my lord's servants? Why does my lord the king DESIRE this thing (II Samuel 24:3) ? WHY SHOULD HE BE A CAUSE OF GUILT IN ISRAEL?»

The regulations regarding numbering are recorded in Exodus 30:11-16. There, in verse 12 it says:

Exodus 30:12

«When you take the census of the children of Israel for their number, then every man shall give a ransom for himself to the Lord, when you number them, THAT THERE MAY BE NO PLAGUE AMONG THEM WHEN *YOU* NUMBER THEM»

Obviously therefore, if a census was not done according to the regulations of Exodus 30, a plague would strike Israel, which is exactly what happened in our case. Really, II Samuel 24:15 tells us:

II Samuel 24:15

«SO THE LORD SENT A PLAGUE UPON ISRAEL....»

The very fact that a plague came upon Israel because of the numbering, shows that David didn't follow the relative regulations of Exodus 30. As Eve, he knew the Word of God BUT HE NEGLECTED IT¹⁰. We are not told what exactly Satan did to make him to walk contrary to God's will, but we are indeed told that it was HIM that moved him to do so, making the sin (i.e. a numbering without following the regulations of the law) to look DESIRABLE (II Samuel 24:3) IN his eyes. What was the effect of David's act on God is recorded in verse 7:

I Chronicles 21:7

«And God WAS DISPLEASED WITH THIS THING;»

God is indeed pleased when we do His will, and He is indeed displeased when we do not do His will. The tempter's job is to deceive us so that to make us neglect the Word of God, and do things that, being not God's will, are sins. As David said, confessing his sin:

I Chronicles 21:8

«So David said to the God «I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing; but now I pray, take away the iniquity of your servant, for **I have done very foolishly**»

Whenever we sin, we are deceived and «do very foolishly», though we may not understand it that time.

¹⁰ Though he was warned by Joab (I Chronicles 21:4)

2.4 David and Bathsheba

Finally, the last example that will be examined here is in II Samuel 11-12 and refers again to David. There, starting from verse 1, we read:

II Samuel 11:1

«It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. **BUT** David remained at Jerusalem.»

The Word in this verse, apart from the historical information that it gives us, it also contrasts (see this «BUT» there) the fact that though it was «the time when kings go out to battle» David stayed.....home. This was certainly not something usual for such a bold and brave man as David. But let's carry on.

II Samuel 11:2-3

«Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman *was* very beautiful to behold.» So David sent and inquired about the woman. And *someone* said, «Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?»

David saw a beautiful woman whom he liked and he inquired about her. From the incoming information, he knew that this woman was married with Uriah the Hittite. One would expect that since David knew this, he wouldn't even think to approach her for he knew very well that according to the law (Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22), this was a sin whose penalty was death. Well.... unfortunately David didn't think the way one would expect. II Samuel 11:4 tells us:

II Samuel 11:4

«Then [AFTER he knew that Bathsheba was married with Uriah] David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house. And the woman conceived; so she sent and told David, and said, I *am* with child.»

In verse 1 David stayed home instead of what was usual for a king: to lead his people to the battle. In verse 2 he got up from his bed to have a walk exactly at the time that Bathsheba was bathing. In verse 3 he inquired about her and he learned that she was married. I don't know whether something was going wrong with him till here, but I do know that something was certainly wrong with him in verse 4, as he slept with a married woman whom he also made pregnant. From that time onwards, the one sin was succeeding the other. Verse 6-12 tells us:

II Samuel 11:6-12

«Then David sent to Joab, *saying*, «Send me Uriah the Hittite». And Joab sent Uriah to David. And when Uriah had come to him, David asked how Joab was doing, and how the people were doing, and how the war prospered. And David said to Uriah, Go down to your house, and wash your feet.» So Uriah departed from the king's house, and a gift *of food* from the king followed him. But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of

his lord, and did not go down to his house. So when they told David, saying, «Uriah did not go down to his house», David said unto Uriah, «Did you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?» And Uriah said to David, «The ark, and Israel, and Judah, are dwelling in tents, and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; Shall I then go to my house, to eat and drink, and to lie with my wife? *As* you live, and *as* your soul lives, I will not do this thing». Then David said to Uriah, «Wait here today also, and tomorrow I will let you depart. So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day, and the next.»

David's «solution» to the problem that he himself created, was to send Uriah to his home, so that to sleep with his wife and be charged with her pregnancy! But Uriah didn't «co-operate». He couldn't afford the ark of God to be out in the field, his co-warriors to fight and he be at home sleeping with his wife. It is not accidental that the Word of God classifies him as one of the thirty seven «mighty men whom David had» (II Samuel 23:8, 39). Uriah was certainly a faithful soldier of David, though David was not faithful to him.

Having failed to deceive Uriah, David went further. Verses 13-15 tells us:

II Samuel 11:13-15

«Now when David called him, he ate and drank before him; and he made him drunk. And at evening he went out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house. In the morning it happened, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent *it* by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retreat from him, that he may be struck down and die.»

It is really difficult to believe that a man who was moved by God (II Peter 1:21) to write a considerable part of His Word, and whose name the Word refers hundreds of times, wrote also such a nasty letter that he sent by the hands of his own victim! However, let's again recall that what we are reading here are not acts of David as a man of God. David was NO longer walking as a man of God, when he did these things. Instead, he was out of fellowship with Him, at least from the time that he slept with Bathsheba. But let's carry on:

II Samuel 11:16-17, 26-27

«So it was, while Joab observed the city, that he assigned Uriah to a place where he knew there *were* valiant men. Then the men of the city came out, and fought with Joab: And *some* of the people of the servants of David fell; and Uriah the Hittite died also.....And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. And when her mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son.»

David finally succeeded in his plan and killed Uriah. He would now expect that he would have no problem as no-one, apart from few people, knew what was done. But the story does not stop here. For though almost no-one knew what had happened, GOD KNEW IT. So let's see what He did:

II Samuel 11:27, 12:1-12

«BUT THE THING THAT DAVID HAD DONE DISPLEASED THE LORD. Then the Lord sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him: «There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. The rich *man* had exceedingly many flocks and herds. But the poor *man* had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and

drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.» So David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, «*As* the Lord lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity.» Then Nathan said to David, «*YOU ARE THE MAN!* Thus says the Lord God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if *that had been* too little, I also would have given you much more! *WHY HAVE YOU DESPISED THE COMMANDMENT OF THE LORD* to do evil in his sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife *to be* your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon. Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because *YOU HAVE DESPISED ME*, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.» Thus says the Lord: «Behold I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun. So David said to Nathan, «*I HAVE SIN AGAINST THE LORD.*»

David, *DESPISED THE COMMANDMENT, THE WORD, OF THE LORD*, as he also had done with the numbering and as Eve also did with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (and as Christ *DIDN'T DO*, though he was tempted *IN ALL*). The result? Sin and evil. However, when he was reproved, he regretted, and confessed his sin. Let's now see whether the Lord forgave him, and what happened with the death penalty of the law. Verse 13 tells us:

II Samuel 12:13

«And Nathan said to David, «*THE LORD HAS PUT AWAY YOUR SIN; YOU SHALL NOT DIE.*»

The Lord *PUT AWAY* David's sin *AS SOON AS HE CONFESSED IT*. His confession also saved him from the death penalty. The phrase «you shall *NOT* die», obviously refers to the death penalty of the law. This was not done exceptionally for David. God really never desired the death of a sinner but his repentance. As it says in Ezekiel 33:11:

Ezekiel 33:11

«Say to them: «*As I live*» says the Lord God «*I HAVE NO PLEASURE IN THE DEATH OF THE WICKED, BUT THAT THE WICKED TURN FROM HIS WAY AND LIVE.*»

What God desires is *LIFE* and fellowship with Him. That's why he immediately forgave David, as He also immediately forgives us, when we confess our sins to him.

3. Conclusion

Concluding therefore:

- i) The master of temptation, the tempter, is the devil.

ii) We give in to temptation when we are deceived by the adversary (explicitly or implicitly) to go after things contrary to the will of God, as this is declared in the Bible or by revelation. The result is always sin. Really, Eve neglected what God had said regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The result? Sin. David neglected what the Word of God said about the numbering. The result? Sin. He also neglected what God had said about adultery. The result? Again sin. On the contrary, Jesus Christ RESPECTED THE WORD OF GOD. He never neglected it, but he used it to face the temptations of the devil. The result? «He was in all tempted as we are, **YET WITHOUT SINS.**» In other words, let's seek and be aware of the will, the word, of God and let's put it deep into our hearts. Let's hold it there and not neglect it, and the devil will not manage to draw us away and make the temptation to bring the result it aims at: i.e. sin.

iii) If it now happens to fall and sin, then there is a need for confession of our sin to God, who in turn will immediately forgive it. As I John 1:9, 2:1-2 tells us:

I John 1:9, 2:1-2

«If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness....My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.»

As soon as we confess our sins to God, HE FORGIVES US. We saw it with David. He did much evil. He even killed Uriah one of his most faithful soldiers. However, as soon as he confessed his sin, «the Lord put it away». The giving in to temptation means sin and the sin needs nothing else but forgiveness: confess therefore your sin to God, forgive also yourself and those that probably played some role there, ask the forgiveness of those that you probably hurt, get any lesson that you can get, AND MOVE AHEAD.

The problem of the lusts [epithumies] of the flesh is not solved by looking at the flesh and what was done. In contrast, it is solved by looking at God and using to the full extent all that He has given us in the new birth. As Galatians 5:16-18 tells us:

Galatians 5:16-18

«I say then, WALK BY THE SPIRIT [new nature] AND [as a result] YOU SHALL NOT FULFILL THE LUST [*epithumies*] OF THE FLESH [old nature]. For the flesh lusts [*epithumo* (the verb form of *epithumia*)] against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.»

Old and new nature are contrary to each other and this passage tells us how we will not fulfill the lusts of the old nature that bring to temptation and sin. The way is simple: «WALK BY THE SPIRIT [new nature]» (i.e. put on and direct your heart to the NEW man, and to all that God has given you in the new birth), «AND» [as a result], «YOU SHALL NOT FULFILL THE LUST OF THE FLESH» (therefore the devil will not manage, though he will still try, to draw you away so that to sin and destroy your fellowship with God).

Tassos Kioulachoglou

Samuel and David

This article is mainly concerned with I Samuel 16. Saul, the first king of Israel, was commanded by God to utterly destroy the Amalekites for all they had done to Israel when he came up from Egypt. However, he didn't perform what was commanded (I Samuel 15:11), and this in turn caused his rejection. Thus, I Samuel 16:1 tell us:

I Samuel 16:1

«Now the Lord said to Samuel, «How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I'm sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided myself a king among his sons.»

Since Saul was rejected, God had to find an appropriate one to fill his gap. As we can see, the one He found was one of the sons of Jesse. Hence, Samuel was commanded to go there and anoint him. A look at the interaction between God and Samuel regarding the king's matter, shows the following:

- i) The Lord appointed Saul to be a king and Samuel anointed him (I Samuel 10:1).
- ii) The Lord rejected Saul, because of his disobedience, and Samuel announced it to him (I Samuel 15:26).
- iii) The Lord appointed David to be the new king, and Samuel was commanded to go and anoint him (I Samuel 16:1).

As it can be seen, Samuel always did WHAT THE LORD HAD FIRST DECIDED. To tell it differently, Samuel was not a decision maker but a decision executor. This is truly very instructive for those of us who, like Samuel, want to serve God. Like him, our role is not a role of a decision maker but a role of a performer of what God has already decided. Samuel didn't make up his mind to anoint Saul, nor did he later decide to tell him that he was rejected by Him. Similarly, he was not the one that determined to go to Jesse's house. ALL was GOD'S decisions, and Samuel simply executed them.

Moving to us now, the Word says that as born again believers, we are members of the one body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:12-31), whose head is Christ (Colossians 1:18). Therefore, as our physical members are under complete subjection to the head, so also we, as members of the body of Christ, should be under complete subjection to the Head of this body, the Lord. He is the Boss, we are His servants. He makes decisions, we execute them.

Returning to Samuel, the Lord directed him to Jesse the Bethlehemite. Yet, he still had some questions. Verses 2-3 tell us:

I Samuel 16:2-3

And Samuel said, «How can I go? If Saul hears *it*, he will kill me.» But the Lord said, take a heifer with you, and say, «I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.» Then invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; you shall anoint for Me the one I name to you.»

God not only told Samuel what to do, but He also told him HOW to do it. Thus, He instructed him to go there with a heifer for a supposed sacrifice, while the true reason of his visit was to anoint the new king.

Having received all the information that he needed, Samuel moved to action. Verse 4 tells us:

I Samuel 16:4

«**SO SAMUEL DID WHAT THE LORD SAID**, and went to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, «Do you come peaceably?» and he said, «Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice.» Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons, and invited them to the sacrifice»

The Lord gave directions to Samuel, and Samuel acted on them. Thus, he went to Bethlehem and soon he had seven of Jesse's sons before him. As we may remember, the Lord had told him that the next king would be one of Jesse's sons, without however telling him, right from the beginning, who exactly this would be. What did Samuel do to find it out? He simply contacted the Boss:

I Samuel 16:6-7

«So it was, when they came, that he looked at Eliab and said, «Surely the Lord's anointed *is* before Him!» But the Lord said to Samuel, «Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. *FOR THE LORD DOES NOT SEE AS MAN SEES; FOR MAN LOOKS AT THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE, BUT THE LORD LOOKS AT THE HEART*»

First in the raw, was Eliab, the eldest son of the family. He must have been handsome and his appearance suitable for a king, for when Samuel saw him, he thought that he was the one («**SURELY** the Lord's anointed is before Him», he said). However, when he presented him to the Lord he got a negative reply. As the passage tells us, the Lord, looking at the heart, refused him. Sometimes you know it happens. We like something, it looks perfect to our physical eyes and thus we are led to believe that it is also the will of God for us. However, we should never make a decision based on the outer appearance. Had Samuel done this, he would have anointed the wrong man. Instead, we should always consult the One that sees where our senses cannot see: **at the heart**.

Returning to Samuel, after God's negative reply for Eliab he moved ahead to the next in the «queue». Verses 8-10 tell us:

I Samuel 16: 8-10

«So Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, «Neither has the Lord chosen this one. Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, «Neither has the Lord chosen this one» Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, «The Lord has not chosen these.»

Samuel presented to the Lord all the sons of Jesse that were there and for all he got a negative reply. Yet, he didn't give up:

I Samuel 16: 11-13

«And Samuel said to Jesse, «Are all the young men here?» Then he said, «There remains yet the youngest, and there he is, keeping the sheep.» And Samuel said to Jesse, «Send and bring him. For we will not sit down till he comes here.» So he sent and brought him in. Now he

was ruddy, with bright eyes, and good looking. And the Lord said, «Arise, anoint him; FOR THIS IS THE ONE!» Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel arose and went to Ramah»

Samuel heard the desired «this is the one», not for the first in the «queue», the one that he expected to be the chosen one, but for the last in the «queue», and only after seven «no». The reason I point this out is because sometimes we may find ourselves in the same position i.e. we present to God choices for things that we know as His will, and the replies we get are negative. «Why Lord?», we say. However, the reason is the same with the reason for which God rejected Eliab: God looks at the heart and makes decisions based on the heart. When therefore He rejects something He does not do it because He wants to.....torture us but because, looking at the heart, at the inner part of the matter, sees that it is not the best for us. As Psalms 84:11 says:

Psalms 84:11

«NO good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.»

Also James 1:17 affirms us:

«Every GOOD gift and every PERFECT gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning»

If God denies something to us, it is only because He loves us and wants us to have the best. Samuel heard seven «no» before the desired positive reply. However, looking back do you think that his faithfulness was worthless? I don't think so. **Though he didn't anoint the first in the «queue», he certainly anointed THE BEST in the «queue».**

Finally, keep in mind that neither Samuel nor David were the leading parts of the story. The former was mourning for Saul, while the latter was keeping the sheep of his father. Instead the leading part of the story was the Lord, who gave revelation to Samuel so that to go to Bethlehem and anoint a man that he never knew before. Similarly, it was the Lord who, some chapters earlier (I Samuel 9), acted with Saul and through the temporary loss of his donkeys and the instruction of his servant, eventually brought him before Samuel to anoint him as a king. In other words, the Lord has all the power to perform His will. When something is His will then HE is the leading part.

Having discussed David's anointing, let's now move ahead to his first public appearance. This is given in I Samuel 17, where starting from verse 1 we read:

I Samuel 17:1-10

«Now the Philistines gathered their armies together to battle, and were gathered at Sochoh, which *belongs* to Judah; they encamped between Sochoh and Azekah, in Ephes Dammim. And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and they encamped in the Valley of Elah, and drew up in battle array against the Philistines. The Philistines stood on a mountain on one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side, with a valley between them. And a champion went out from the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, from Gath, whose height *was* six cubits and a span. *He had* a bronze helmet on his head, and he *was* armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat *was* five thousand shekels of bronze. And *he had* bronze armor on his legs and a bronze javelin between his shoulders. Now the staff of his spear *was* like a weaver's beam, and his iron spearhead *weighed* six hundred shekels; and a shield - bearer went before him. Then he stood and cried out to the armies of Israel, and said to them, «Why have you come out to line up for battle? *Am* I not a Philistine, and you the servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us.» And the Philistine said, «I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together»

Though Israel had many times in the past been in a war with the Philistines, this seemed to be a different case. The reason is because instead of an ordinary fight, the Philistines brought forth Goliath, a heavy armed man with unusual physical abilities, who was threatening Israel, asking for a man to fight with him. The reaction of Israel to his proposal is given in verse 11:

I Samuel 17:11

«When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, **they were dismayed and greatly afraid**»

To see how far was this reaction from what God promised in His Word for similar cases, let's compare it with Leviticus 26:3, 7-8 and Joshua 23:9-11. So there we read:

Leviticus 26:3, 7-8

«If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then.....you will chase your enemies, and they shall fall by the sword before you. Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight»

Also Joshua 23:9-11 tells us:

«For the Lord has driven out from before you great and strong nations; but *as for* you no one has been able to stand against you to this day. One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the Lord your God *is* He who fights for you, as He promised you. Therefore take careful heed to yourselves, that you love the Lord your God.»

God's promise was that if they walked with Him, just one of them would be enough to chase a thousand, and «a hundred shall put ten thousand to flight». Nevertheless, what we see here is the exact opposite: one Philistine put all Israel to flight! Fortunately, the story does not stop here:

I Samuel 17:12, 16-23

«Now David *was* the son of that Ephrathite of Bethlehem Judah, whose name was Jesse and who had eight sons. And the Philistine drew near and presented himself forty days, morning and evening. Then Jesse said to his son David, «Take now for your brothers an ephah of this dried *grain* and these ten loaves, and run to your brothers at the camp. And carry these ten cheeses to the captain of *their* thousand, and see how your brothers fare and bring back news of them.» Now Saul and they and all the men of Israel *were* in the Valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines. So David rose early in the morning, left the sheep with a keeper, and took *the things* and went as Jesse had commanded him. And he came to the camp as the army was going out to the fight and shouting for the battle. For Israel and the Philistines had drawn up in battle array, army against army. And David left his supplies in the hand of the supply keeper, ran to the army, and came and greeted his brothers. Then as he talked with them, there was the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, coming up from the armies of Philistines; and he spoke according to the same words. SO DAVID HEARD THEM.»

David had just arrived at the battlefield, to see his brothers. There, as he talked with them, he saw Goliath threatening Israel for one more time. Both he and the people of Israel heard what Goliath said. Nevertheless, they didn't respond the same way. Verse 24 tells us:

I Samuel 17:24

«And **all the men of Israel**, when they saw the man, **fled from him and were dreadfully afraid.**»

As it can be seen, the people continued to react the same way as forty days earlier i.e. fearfully. Nonetheless this was not true for David. In verses 25-26 we read:

I Samuel 17:25-26

«So the men of Israel said, «Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel; and it shall be *that* the man who kills him the king will enrich with great riches, will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel.» Then David spoke to the men who stood by him, saying, «**What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?**» And the people answered him in this manner, saying, «So shall it be done for the man who kills him.»

Both David and the people heard and saw the same things. However, their response to them was entirely different. Thus, while the people **were looking at the problem** and evaluated it according to what they saw and heard, **David was looking at the Word of God** and evaluated the problem ACCORDING TO THIS WORD. Hence, while the people wondered «who are we in comparison to Goliath?», David's wonder was «who is Goliath in comparison to God?». It is not therefore what we see but how we evaluate what we see. **Do we evaluate it as Israel, i.e. using our five senses, the seeming reality, or we evaluate it as David i.e. using the Word of God, the truth, as the standard?**

The words that David spoke made so much impression to the people that reported them to Saul, who then sent for David:

I Samuel 17:31-37

«Now when the words which David spoke were heard, they reported *them* to Saul; and he sent for him. Then David said to Saul, «Let no man's heart fail because of him; your servant

will go and fight with this Philistine.» And Saul said to David, «You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you *are* a youth, and he a man of war from his youth». But David said to Saul, «Your servant used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion and a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it. Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine **will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God.**» Moreover David said, «The Lord, who delivered me out of the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, **HE WILL DELIVERED ME FROM THE HAND OF THIS PHILISTINE.**» And Saul said to David, «Go, and the Lord be with you!»

As it can be seen, between David and Saul there was the same divergence of views that there was between David and the people. Thus for Saul, David was unable to fight with Goliath. The reason? The physical facts: David was only a boy, a shepherd. How then could he have any chance against such an experienced and heavy armed warrior as Goliath?

On the other hand, David not only believed that he could fight against Goliath, but he was also sure that he would win him. The reason? The power of God and the promises of His Word. How could really Goliath have any chance against the power of God?

Therefore both David and Saul had reasons to believe what they believed. The former had physical reasons while the latter had spiritual reasons. The former was looking at the physical facts (weapons, height, experience), while the latter at the spiritual facts (promises of the Word of God). The former was trembling from fear, while the latter was full of courage. Who of these two chose to believe the right source of information becomes evident from the verses that follow.

I Samuel A 17:40-51

«Then he took his staff in his hand; and he chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag, in a pouch which he had, and his sling was in his hand. And he drew near to the Philistine. So the Philistine came, and began drawing near to David, and the man who bore the shield *went* before him. And when the Philistine looked about and saw David, he disdained him; for he was only a youth, ruddy and good-looking. So the Philistine said to David, «*Am* I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?» And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine said to David, «Come to me and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!» Then David said to the Philistine, «**you come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hands.**»

So it was, when the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, that David hurried and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. Then David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone; and he slung *it* and struck the Philistine in his forehead, so that the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the earth. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a slink and a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him. But *there was* no sword in the hand of David. Therefore David ran and stood over the Philistine, took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and cut off his head with it.»

Goliath, the Philistine that had made all Israel trembling for forty days, was defeated by a young boy whose only physical weapon was a sling and five smooth stones. Nevertheless, David didn't go to this fight based on his physical weapons. As he said to his opponent in verse 45: «YOU come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin [physical weapons]. BUT I come to you IN THE NAME OF THE LORD **OF HOSTS**». Yes, Goliath was heavy armed. Yes, he was very strong. But so what? Was he stronger than THE LORD **OF HOSTS**? Was he mightier than HIM? I don't think so. The question therefore is not whether we have the physical means to face a situation, but whether we trust THE Power, THE Weapon, that is called THE LORD **OF HOSTS**. The Weapon is there waiting for us. It was there for Israel all the days that they were trembling from fear. However, they, instead of trusting it, were looking for salvation through «sword and spear», and when they couldn't find it they were terrified. As Proverbs 18:10 tells us:

Proverbs 18:10

«The name of the Lord IS A STRONG TOWER; The righteous run to it and are safe»

Our strong fortress is the Lord. Only in Him there is true security. Either therefore we go to him as David did, or we are looking somewhere else for security, as Israel did. As Jeremiah 9:23-24 says:

Jeremiah 9:23-24

«Thus says the Lord: Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty *man* glory in his might, Nor let the rich *man* glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgement, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,» says the Lord»

Articles

- **The heart**
- **The resurrection of the Lord**
- **Cares, Prayer and Believing**

The heart

The word «heart» is one of the most frequently used words in the Bible. Really, it occurs 876 times there and I thought to have a look at some of these occurrences.

1. The tree and the fruit

To start, we will go to Matthew 12:33-35. There Jesus Christ said:

Matthew 12:33-35

«A tree is known by *its* fruit..... For out of the abundance of the **HEART** the mouth speaks. **A good man out of the good treasure of HIS HEART brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things**»

Also Matthew 7:16-18 tells us:

«Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A GOOD TREE CANNOT BEAR BAD FRUIT, NOR CAN A BAD TREE BEAR GOOD FRUIT.»

A fruit is always the result of the tree that is behind it. No fruit can be produced without a tree, and no fruit can be different than the tree that produced it. The Lord uses this figure here to tell us that what a man brings forth is the result and in direct analogy with the treasure he has in his heart. A good treasure produces good fruit, and an evil treasure produces evil fruit. As Proverbs 4:23 tells us:

Proverbs 4:23

«Above all else, guard your heart, **FOR OUT OF IT ARE THE ISSUES OF LIFE**»

Out of the heart are the issues of life i.e. the results, the fruit we bring forth in our lives. **The heart and what comes in it determines therefore the fruits that come out of it.**

2. The Word and the fruit

Having seen that the outcome we bring forth in our lives depends on the treasure kept in our hearts, and assuming that we do all want to bring forth good fruit, we will now move ahead to see the good treasure that is appropriate for this fruit. To see it we will go to Proverbs 4:20. There God, speaking as a Father, says:

Proverbs 4:20-21

«MY SON, GIVE ATTENTION TO MY WORDS; INCLINE YOUR EAR TO MY SAYINGS. DO NOT LET THEM DEPART FROM YOUR EYES; **KEEP THEM IN THE MIDST OF YOUR HEART**»

Our Father calls us to give ATTENTION TO HIS WORDS. TO INCLINE OUR EARS TO HIS SAYINGS. TO KEEP THEM IN THE MIDST OF OUR HEART. As we saw previously, the treasure that is in our hearts determines the fruit we bring forth in our lives.

This is valid for the Word of God as well. It also brings fruit when it is kept in our heart. What kind of fruit it brings, is given in verse 21, where we read:

Proverbs 4:21-22

«KEEP THEM [the words of God] IN THE MIDST OF YOUR HEART; FOR THEY *ARE LIFE* TO THOSE WHO FIND THEM, AND HEALTH TO ALL THEIR FLESH.»

The words of God kept in the heart are life and health. As Jesus said in Matthew 4:4

Matthew 4:4

«Man shall not LIVE by bread alone, but BY EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD»

Man is impossible to live without the word of God. Yet, to bring forth good fruit from the Word, **he has to keep it in his heart**. As Jesus again said, explaining the well known parable of the good sower.

Luke 8:11-15

«Now the parable is this: THE SEED IS THE WORD OF GOD. Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away THE WORD OUT OF THEIR HEART, lest they should believe and be saved. But the ones on the rock *are those* who when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. Now the ones *that* fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches and pleasures of life and bring NO FRUIT to maturity. **But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word WITH A NOBLE AND A GOOD HEART KEEP IT AND BEAR FRUIT WITH PATIENCE.**»

It is the Word of God heard by and kept with a noble and a good heart that gives good fruit, life abundant, exactly as God desires us to have (John 10:10)

3. God looks at the heart and wants the heart

That the Lord is interested in the heart is evident from other parts of the Word as well. Thus in I Samuel 16:7 we read:

I Samuel 16:7

«*The Lord does not see* as man sees; for man looks at the outer appearance **but the Lord looks at the HEART.**»

The Lord is interested in the heart. He does not care for our outer appearance i.e. if we seem to be «good» and «godly». The Pharisees used to be like that. They seemed to be godly outwardly, yet inwardly they were hypocrites! As Jesus Christ characteristically said to them:

Luke 16:15

«And he said to them, You are those who justify yourselves before men, BUT GOD KNOWS YOUR HEART»

God knows the hearts of all of us, and as I Corinthians 4:5 makes clear, the day will come when the Lord «will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of THE HEARTS. Then each one's praise will come from God.» Contrary to man that cares for the outside, God cares for the inside, the heart. That's why in Proverbs 23:26 He calls us:

Proverbs 23:26

«MY SON, GIVE ME **YOUR HEART**, AND LET YOUR EYES OBSERVE MY WAYS»

Many are ready to do various things in the name of God¹¹. Yet what He wants is to simply give to Him our hearts. He does not want the fruit, our acts first, but the tree that makes the fruit. If the tree - our heart - is given to Him, then the fruit that will be produced will be good as it will be coming from a heart that is given to Him and is directed BY HIM.

4. «With all our hearts»

From the above it should be clear that God is interested in our heart. However, as we will see, He is not only interested in it, but He also wants it in its totality. Really, starting from Matthew 22:35-38 we read:

Matthew 22:35-38

«then one of them, a lawyer, asked *Him a question*, testing him and saying, Teacher, which is the great commandment of the law?» Jesus said to him, «**You shall love the Lord your God WITH ALL YOUR HEART, with all your soul, and with all your mind.**»

Also Deuteronomy 10:12

«And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, AND TO LOVE HIM, TO SERVE THE LORD YOUR GOD **WITH ALL YOUR HEART** AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL»

Deuteronomy 4:29

«You will seek the Lord your God, and you will find *Him* **IF YOU SEEK HIM WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL**»

Jeremiah 29:13:

«YOU WILL SEEK ME AND FIND *ME*; **WHEN YOU SEEK ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART**»

(NKJV-RSV)

Joel 2:12-13

«Now, therefore,» says the Lord, «Turn to Me WITH ALL YOUR HEART..... REND YOUR HEART, AND NOT YOUR GARMENTS; RETURN TO THE LORD YOUR GOD, for He *is* gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness.»

Proverbs 3:1

«My son, do not forget my law, But **let your heart keep my commands; for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you.....Trust in the Lord WITH ALL YOUR**

¹¹ However, not necessary originated by His spirit!

HEART AND LEAN NOT ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.»

We chose the above passages because of their references to «ALL the heart». God looks at and wants ALL our heart. He wants us to love Him with all our heart, to seek Him with all our heart, to serve Him with all our heart, to trust Him with all our heart, to return to Him with all our heart. As II Chronicles 6:14 says: the Lord «keeps His covenant and mercy with His servants **WHO WALK BEFORE HIM WITH ALL THEIR HEART**»

5. Sin: An issue of the heart

As we have seen by now, God looks at and is interested in the heart. No surprise therefore that He also considers sin as an issue of the heart. Really, in Matthew 5:27-28 we read:

Matthew 5:27-28

«You have heard that it was said to those of old, «You shall not commit adultery» But I say to you that whoever looks at the woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her IN HIS HEART»

This passage has troubled many and this because they connect sin with outer acts. Yet God does not do this. He connects sin with the HEART, the place where He looks at. When the evil becomes part of our heart is sin, irrespective of when and whether it will be manifested with outer acts¹². As Psalms 66:18 tells us:

Psalms 66:18

«**If I regard iniquity in my heart**, the Lord will not hear»

And in Isaiah 59:1-2 we read:

«Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; Nor his ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear»

Sin breaks our fellowship with God, and as it may be obvious from the above, this happens at the very time that it is conceived in our hearts. That's why it is so necessary to guard our heart. To ask God, as David did, to clean it from all iniquity (Psalms 51:9-10, 139:23-24). To check and filter what gets into it, making sure that the only that reigns there is God and His Word.

6. Conclusion.

¹² As we have already seen, «out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks» (Matthew 12:33), and «A good man out of the good treasure of HIS HEART brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things» (Matthew 12:35). Sooner or later, the evil treasure will give the respective fruits.

In this article we looked at some of the passages that refer to the heart. When in the Scripture there are 876 references to the word «heart» it is obvious that it is not possible with 10 pages to cover the topic completely. However we hope that what we saw made clear the importance of the heart and the weight that God gives to it. Thus as we saw:

- i) The heart is the tree on which the fruit we bring forth depends. If what we have in our heart is good then the fruit we will bring forth will also be good and conversely.
- ii) The requirement for the heart to give good fruit is to keep in it the Word of God. The words of God kept there are LIFE.
- iii) Since now the fruit we bring forth depends on the treasure we have in our hearts (Matthew 7:16-18) and since good fruit is given only by the one that keeps the Word of God in his heart (Luke 8:15), we can conclude that when the Word of God tells us that we should guard our hearts above all else, it does not mean that we should guard the evil treasure that may be there. This should be taken away and in its stead we should take care to always have the good treasure that is able to give good fruit and LIFE: the Word of God.
- iv) The heart is the part at which God looks and which He wants us to give to Him.
- v) He wants us to love Him with all our heart
- vi) To serve Him with all our heart
- vii) To seek Him with all our heart
- viii) When we deviate from His ways, to return to Him with all our heart
- ix) To trust in him with all our heart
- x) Finally we saw that sin is an issue of the heart and therefore as such should be faced.

May therefore deliver all our heart to our Father, as He calls us. As the Lord said:

John 15:4-8

«Abide in me and I in you. **AS THE BRANCH CANNOT BEAR FRUIT OF ITSELF, UNLESS IT ABIDES IN THE VINE, NEITHER CAN YOU, UNLESS YOU ABIDE IN ME.** I'm the vine, you are the branches. HE WHO ABIDES IN ME AND I IN HIM BEARS MUCH FRUIT; for without me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned. IF YOU ABIDE IN ME, AND MY WORDS ABIDE IN YOU, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. BY THIS MY FATHER IS GLORIFIED, **THAT YOU BEAR MUCH FRUIT;**»

Tassos Kioulachoglou

The resurrection of the Lord

April is usually the month of the commemoration of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. We would like therefore to devote this article to this event, mainly concentrating the attention on the book of Acts.

1. Acts 2:22-36

To start we will go to Acts 2. We are at the day of Pentecost, just after the pouring out of the holy spirit and its manifestation by speaking in tongues (Acts 2:1-12). This manifestation made people to amaze and wonder and Peter explained to them that this was but the fulfillment of the relative prophecy of Joel (Acts 2:14-21, Joel 2:28-29). Then he continued, turning his preaching to the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, starting from Acts 2:22 we read:

Acts 2:22-24

«Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves also know - Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; **WHOM GOD RAISED UP, HAVING LOOSED THE PAINS OF DEATH, BECAUSE IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE THAT he should be held by it.**»

GOD RAISED JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD! THOUGH THEY CRUCIFIED HIM, DEATH WAS NOT POSSIBLE TO HAVE PERMANENT EFFECTS ON HIM. And Peter continues confirming the fact of the resurrection from the Old Testament scriptures:

Acts 2:25-28

«For David says concerning him: I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For you will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will you allow your holy one to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of joy in your presence.»

This record comes from the book of Psalms (Psalms 16:8-11), and it is evident that Peter links it directly to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Really, his soul was not left in Hades nor he saw corruption. However, how was Peter able to know that this passage referred to the resurrection of the Lord? Similarly, how was he able to know that Joel's prophecy to which he referred previously, was about what had happened that day? The answer is simple: **THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT** that he had just received and which enabled him to understand the Scriptures. Peter was not an educated theologian. He was not a Th.D/Ph.D. man. He was just a fisherman that was called by the Lord to follow him, and who, as Acts 4:13 tells us, was illiterate! Yet he was someone that had received the power from on high (Luke 24:49), the gift of the holy spirit, the comforter that would lead them to all truth as Jesus had promised them (John 16:13). It was this comforter that enabled him to understand the Scriptures and it is only through this comforter that a man can understand the spiritual things, part of which is also the written Word of God (I Corinthians 2:10-13). Continuing in Acts 2, let's read the explanation that God through His spirit gave to Peter, regarding David's prophecy. This is given in verses 29-36:

Acts 2:29-36

«Men and brethren, let *me* speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he foreseeing this, spoke **CONCERNING THE RESURECTION OF THE CHRIST**, that his soul was not left in Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. **THIS JESUS GOD HAS RAISED UP, OF WHICH WE ARE ALL**

WITNESSES. THEREFORE BEING EXALTED TO THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD AND HAVING RECEIVED FROM THE FATHER THE PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, HE Poured OUT THIS WHICH YOU NOW SEE AND HEAR. For David did not ascend into heavens, but he says himself: The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.»

Jesus Christ was risen from the dead. It was he who, alive now, received from the Father the gift of the holy spirit and literally poured it out.

Reading further we will see that 3000 (Acts 2:41) people were added to the faith that day, after the outpouring of the holy spirit and the inspired preaching of Peter that followed it.

2. Acts 3

Soon after the above incidence, follows the one that we read in Acts 3. Peter and John, on their way to the temple, saw a lame man whom they healed. This again made people to amaze and verses 11-15 tells us what followed.

Acts 3:11-15

«Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed. So when Peter saw *it*, he responded to the people: «Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our father, glorified His servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let *him* go. But you denied the holy one and the just and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the prince of peace, WHOM GOD RAISED FROM THE DEAD, OF WHICH WE ARE WITNESSES»

Once more, Peter confronts the people for what they had done. However, he didn't do it to condemn them but to make them recognize their error and repent. As verses 19-20 tell us :

Acts 3:19-20, 25-26

«REPENT therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before.....you are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, «and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.» To you first, God, **HAVING RAISED UP HIS SERVANT JESUS, SENT HIM TO BLESS YOU, IN TURNING AWAY EVERY ONE OF YOU FROM YOUR INIQUITIES**»

God raised Jesus Christ from the dead and sent him to bless us! As Ephesians 1:3 characteristically tells us:

Ephesians 1:3

«Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **WHO HAS BLESSED US WITH EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES IN CHRIST**»

God has BLESSED US with all spiritual blessings IN CHRIST. Truly in him, our raised Lord, we have every spiritual blessing that we could possibly have! As Paul also says regarding the resurrection:

Acts 17:30-31

«Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness BY THE MAN WHOM HE HAS ORDAINED AND HE HAS GIVEN ASSURANCE OF THIS TO ALL **BY RAISING HIM FROM THE DEAD.**»

God will judge the world through Jesus and the proof of this is that HE RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD. As Romans 1:1-4 also say:

Romans 1:1-4

«Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle.....concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, *AND DECLARED TO BE* THE SON OF GOD WITH POWER ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT OF HOLINESS, BY THE RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD.»

Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is the one through whom God will judge the world and the proof of these, «the assurance to all», is HIS RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD.

Returning to Acts, chapter 4 gives us the results and the reaction to the preaching of Peter concerning Christ and the resurrection.

Acts 4:1-3

«Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and PREACHED IN JESUS THE RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD. And they laid hands on them, and put *them* in custody until the next day, for it was already evening»

Saducees were those guys that believed that «there is no resurrection and no angel or spirit» (Acts 23:8). Obviously therefore, when they heard about the resurrection were offended. However, they were not the only ones. Everyday we see this. You speak the Word of God and some are offended. But as verse 4 tells us:

Acts 4:4

«**MANY** OF THOSE WHO HEARD THE WORD BELIEVED; AND THE NUMBER OF THE MEN CAME TO BE ABOUT FIVE THOUSAND.»

Not all believed. In fact some were offended. Yet MANY, as the text says, believed and were saved. But let's continue to see what happened to the apostles:

Acts 4:5-12

«And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, «By what power or by what name you have done this?» Then Peter, filled with the holy spirit, said to them, «Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed *done* to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, THAT BY THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST

OF NAZARETH, WHOM YOU CRUCIFIED, WHOM GOD RAISED FROM THE DEAD, BY HIM THIS MAN STANDS HERE BEFORE YOU WHOLE. This is the «stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone. **Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.**»

The boldness of the apostles is really impressive. It was neither professors nor great educated theologians that made Christianity to live. It was only a handful of simple illiterate people, FULL OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD and committed to the mission given to them by the Lord, that put the foundations of the first century church. A handful of faithful men ready to give witness to their Lord and his resurrection, wherever God was calling them, even before their own persecutors.

3. Acts 5:14-32

The above case of persecution against people that stood for God is not the only one. In fact, the book of Acts is full of similar incidences one of which is given in Acts 5. There, verses 14-21 tell us:

Acts 5:14-21

«And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they brought the sick out into the streets and led *them* on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed. Then the high priest rose up, and all those that were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. BUT at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, «Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life. And when they heard *that*, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught»

The evil the apostles did and which caused their imprisonment was that through the power of God healed the people! Nevertheless, they didn't stay much in the prison: God sent an angel who not only delivered them, but he also told them to continue doing exactly what offended the authorities i.e. to preach «all the words of this life», the Word of God! Verses 25-32 tell us:

Acts 5:21-32

«And when they heard *that*, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported, saying, «Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, WE FOUND NO ONE INSIDE!» Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be. So one came and told them, saying, «Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!» Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, «Did

we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intent to bring this man's blood on us!» BUT Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: «We ought to obey God rather than men. THE GOD OF OUR FATHERS RAISED UP JESUS WHOM YOU MURDERED BY HANGING ON A TREE. HIM GOD HAS EXALTED TO HIS RIGHT HAND *TO BE* PRINCE AND SAVIOUR, TO GIVE REPENTANCE TO ISRAEL AND FORGIVENESS OF SINS. AND WE ARE HIS WITNESSES TO THESE THINGS AND *SO ALSO IS* THE HOLY SPIRIT WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN TO THOSE WHO OBEY HIM.»

GOD RAISED JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD AND HE APPOINTED HIM TO BE PRINCE AND SAVIOUR. The witnesses to this are not only the apostles and the Bible but also the holy spirit that our raised Lord literally poured out in the day of Pentecost. Every time therefore we operate this spirit we witness that JESUS IS ALIVE. As he also said in Mark 16:17-20:

Mark 16:17-20

«AND THESE SIGNS WILL FOLLOW THOSE WHO BELIEVE: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.» So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with *them* and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen»

The holy spirit is not a dead theoretical entity. It is the power of God, Christ in us, that is also MANIFESTED in the nine ways stated in I Corinthians 12 and into which the above signs also fall. Every time therefore we operate these manifestations we really witness that Jesus Christ is alive, and not only that but also that he is very very close to us: IN US (Galatians 4:6, II Corinthians 13:15, Colossians 1:27).

4. Acts 10

And since we speak about the holy spirit, let's also go to Acts 10. There we find Kornelious who was commanded by God to send to Joppa and invite Peter to come and speak the Word to him. Peter did that and verses 38-46 tell us what he said to them:

Acts 10:38-46

«God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the holy spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. HIM GOD RAISED UP ON THE THIRD DAY, AND SHOWED HIM OPENLY, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, *even* to us who ate and drank with him after he was risen from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is he who was ordained by God *to be* judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets witness that through his name, whoever believes in him will receive remission of sins.»

Acts 11:14 tells us that God told Kornelious to send for Peter to speak to him words able to save him and all his household. What were these words? Do not imagine books upon

books. We have just given the most part of what Peter told them! Thus, he spoke about Jesus, his walk with God, his resurrection and its significance. These were the words they needed to hear and believe in order to be saved. Words less than ten verses that in fact in Romans 10:9 are summed up to only one verse!

Romans 10:9

«IF YOU CONFESS WITH YOUR MOUTH THE LORD JESUS AND BELIEVE IN YOUR HEART THAT GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD YOU WILL **BE SAVED**»

Salvation is not our job. It is the job of Jesus Christ our SAVIOUR, who gave his life for us, so that by simply confessing him as Lord and believing that God raised him from the dead, we are saved! Returning to Acts, verses 44-46 give us very lively, the result that the Word of God had on those people:

Acts 10:44-46

«While Peter was still speaking these words, the holy spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the holy spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.»

Not only these people believed, but they also manifested the holy spirit they received by speaking in tongues, thus magnifying God, and making clear that Christ, that poured the holy spirit out, is ALIVE, in the right hand of God and in the hearts of those that believe in him.

5. Acts 13: 23-39

Finally, the last passage we are going to consider from the book of Acts is in Acts 13. There we find Paul preaching in Antioch and evangelizing Jesus Christ to them. We will start reading his preaching from verse 23

Acts 13:23 - 39

«From this man's [David's] seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior - Jesus - after John had first preached, before his coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his course, he said, «Who do you think I am? I am not *he*. But behold, there comes one after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose.» Men *and* brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent. For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know him, nor even the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled *them* in condemning *him*. And though they found no cause for death in *him*, they asked Pilate that he should be put to death. Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning him, they took *him* down from the tree and laid *him* in a tomb. BUT GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD. HE WAS SEEN FOR MANY DAYS BY THOSE WHO CAME UP WITH HIM FROM GALILEE TO JERUSALEM, WHO ARE HIS WITNESSES TO THE PEOPLE. And we declare to you glad tidings - that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, IN THAT HE HAS RAISED UP JESUS. As it is also written in the second Psalm: You are my son, today I have begotten you. AND THAT HE RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD, NO MORE TO RETURN TO CORRUPTION, HE HAS SPOKEN THUS: I WILL GIVE YOU THE

SURE MERCIES OF DAVID. THEREFORE HE ALSO SAYS IN ANOTHER *PSALM*: YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO SEE CORRUPTION.» For David after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers and saw corruption; BUT HE WHOM GOD RAISED UP SAW NO CORRUPTION. Therefore let it be known to you brethren , that through this man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.»

Christ didn't appear just for a moment. He didn't even appear only for a little time. In contrast, he appeared for MANY DAYS, making clear that he is ALIVE AND INCORRUPTIBLE. It is through the resurrection that God certified that Jesus is the one through whom He will judge the world. It is the resurrection that proves beyond anything else that Jesus is the Son of God. It is believing in the resurrection that gives salvation and it is the name of the raised Christ the most powerful name, the only name that has been given by God to be saved and have fellowship with Him.

Tassos Kioulachoglou

Cares, Prayer and Believing

Stress is certainly one of the top problems of our age. The media and the doctors very frequently speak about it and a whole category of professionals (psychoanalysts, psychologists, therapists etc.) has been grown to help people to fight it. However, their "solutions" - usually some advises or worse, some pills that perhaps differ little from common drugs - cannot give a real answer to it, and this because they ignore what the Word of God says about it. Therefore, if we don't want to be ignorant as well, it is needed to see what this Word says and this is what we will do today.

1. Philippians 4:4-7

Though many passages of the Word deal with the problem of anxiety, a look just at Philippians 4:4-7 is enough to show us what God thinks about it. Really, there we read:

Philippians 4:4-7

"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. **BE ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING, BUT IN EVERYTHING BY PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION, WITH THANKSGIVING, LET YOUR REQUESTS BE MADE KNOWN TO GOD; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"**

Verse 4 calls us to rejoice IN THE LORD and in fact to rejoice, to be glad in Him, ALWAYS. As it says, the Lord is "at hand" i.e. very near to us. That's why we should be "ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING BUT in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to let our requests be made known to God;" As it may be obvious, the word "but" that is used in this passage makes a contrast between what we should not do and which is to be anxious, and what we should do and which is "in everything to let our requests be made known to God by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving". Another contrast is also made with the words «nothing» and «everything». Thus, we are to be anxious for NOTHING

but in EVERYTHING to let our requests be made known to God. The guaranteed result of these instructions is given in verse 7, where we are promised that if we follow them "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Summarizing therefore, the solution that God suggests to the anxiety problem is very very simple: it consists of one "not to do": do not be anxious or "be anxious for nothing". One "to do": "in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God", and the result that is PEACE, and in fact "the peace of GOD [the only true peace], which surpasses all understanding".

2. I Peter 5:7

The above passage of Philippians 4 is not the only one that is concerned with the cares problem. With the same problem is also I Peter 5:7 concerned. There we read:

I Peter 5:6-7

"Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, **CASTING ALL YOUR CARES UPON HIM, FOR HE CARES FOR YOU**"

To take something that is upon you and cast it upon someone else requires action. That's exactly what God asks to do with our cares¹³: instead of bearing them on ourselves, He asks us to take action, but not by worrying for them but by casting them on HIM. And this not only for a few cares that we may think as more important than others, but for **ALL OUR CARES**. "**CAST ALL YOUR CARES UPON HIM, FOR HE CARES FOR YOU**" says the Word. Moreover, in another part it says:

Psalms 55:22

«**Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you**; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved»

Obviously therefore, the question is not whether God cares for us nor whether He desires to be our cares-bearer but whether WE WILL HAVE THE HUMILITY ("humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.....casting all your cares upon Him" the text says) to cast all our cares UPON HIM, exactly as He calls us.

3. Matthew 6:25-34

Apart from the above two passages, that are concerned with the cares problem, Matthew 6:25-34 is also concerned with it. There we read:

Matthew 6:25-34

"Therefore I say to you **do not worry [Greek: "merimno" the same word as in Philippians 4:6 and I Peter 5:7] about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on**. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you

¹³The word "care" in this passage is a translation of the Greek noun "μέριμνα" (merimna) the verb form of which ["μεριμνάω" (merimnao)] is translated as "be anxious" in Philippians 4:4-7.

worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat? or "what shall we drink?" or what shall we wear?" For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. **But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.**"

Food water and clothes are some of our most basic physical needs. However, we are not the only ones that know this. GOD knows it as well!! That's why He tells us through the Lord Jesus Christ: "**DO NOT WORRY**", saying, "What shall we eat" or "what shall we drink?" or "what shall we wear?"for your Heavenly Father knows that you need all these things¹⁴. And if one asks what are we to do instead of worrying, verse 33 tells us: "seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness and all these things will be added to you". FIRST is God, His kingdom and His righteousness and all the other things will be added to us. As also Matthew 7:7-11 says:

Matthew 7:7-11

"ASK and it shall be given to you; SEEK and you will find; KNOCK, and it shall be opened to you. For **EVERYONE WHO ASKS RECEIVES, AND HE WHO SEEKS FINDS, AND TO HIM WHO KNOCKS IT WILL BE OPENED**. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things **to those who ask Him?**"

Who is the one that finds? Who is the one to whom it will be opened? To whom God will give good things? To those that ASK Him, to those that knock His door. Again therefore, as in I Peter 5:7 also here the question is not whether God is willing to take action and cover our needs but whether WE will take action, not by worrying but by praying (that's our action, plus anything else that God may tell us to do), casting all our cares upon Him. It is then His job to act, giving us what we have prayed for and even more (Ephesians 3:20), IF of course what we have prayed for is in accordance with His will.

I. **I John 5:14-15**

Regarding the latter (i.e. the alignment of what we ask of God with His will) I John 5:14-15 tells us:

I John 5:14-15

¹⁴The passage does not say "do not pray" but "**DO NOT WORRY** for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things". The teaching is against worries and not against prayer which in fact is what is suggested against worries (see Philippians 4:4-7, I Peter 5:7 and Matthew 7:7-11).

"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that **IF WE ASK ANYTHING ACCORDING TO HIS WILL**, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him"

This passage does not say that "if we ask anything God hears us" but "if we ask anything, ACCORDING TO HIS WILL, God hears us". Therefore, for our prayer to be heard it is necessary what we pray to be in alignment with God's will, which as Romans 12:2 tells us is: "GOOD, ACCEPTABLE AND PERFECT". Thus, it is necessary to know the will of God so that to know what we should expect from Him. And as to know the will of someone he has first to make it known to us somehow, so also to know the will of God He has to make it known to us, either through the Bible, His written word, or through the holy spirit that He gave us when we were born again. Regarding the former, when for example it says that we should not care about eating, drinking and clothing but seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to us, it gives us the will of God about cares and priorities: put God first it tells us, be anxious for nothing; instead cast all your cares upon Him, and "all these things will be added to you". The same also happens with many other things that have general application for all, such as salvation, manifestations of the spirit, healing etc. For these and for any other thing that the rightly divided Word of God defines as God's will, it is not needed to wait for God to come and announce to us in private that we can really have them for HE HAS ALREADY ANNOUNCED THIS IN HIS WORD.

However, apart from the things that have a general application and are fully covered by the written Word of God, the Bible, there are also other, special things, that because of their special character are not covered by it. Thus for example, the Word of God, apart from some general guidelines about what we should generally expect¹⁵, does not tell me that the x job is for me, or that I should go to the so and so place tomorrow to do the such and such work for God there. How therefore can I know what is the will of God about these or other similar things? The answer is THROUGH THE SPIRIT THAT GOD GAVE US to communicate with us. God is not only in the Bible, as many Christians think. He is also in us through the spirit that He gave us and which is manifested by the nine ways enumerated in I Corinthians 12:8-10. These are: word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, kinds of tongues, interpretation of tongues. From these nine manifestations, those of word of knowledge and word of wisdom have specifically been given to us for knowledge and wisdom about situations, that otherwise would be impossible to acquire by the five sense. Thus, if I want to learn whether it is God's will to get the so and so job or to do the such and such thing, I should not go to my intellect, nor should I start try it out. Instead, I should go to my Father, discuss the thing with Him, and He will make known to me whether it is wise and good to make the choices that I may consider to make. As James 1:5 says:

James 1:5

"if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach and it will be given to him"

God really wants us (this is His WILL) to go to Him and receive wisdom abundantly and without reproach.

¹⁵It tells us for example that the gifts of God are good and perfect (James 1:17), that God is able to do exceedingly, abundantly, above all that we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20), that the blessing of the Lord makes one rich, and he adds no sorrow with it (Proverbs 9:22) etc..

To conclude therefore: God really nowhere tells us that all His will is in His written Word, as many people support. A large part of it that has general application for everybody and that we all need is there. Yet, there are things that are special and cannot be covered by the written Word. These include a large part of our everyday decisions and God certainly is not without a will for them. He really has a will for everything we are doing and the way to find it, if of course it is not already written in the Bible, is by asking Him to show it to us, to reveal it to us, through His spirit.

Returning therefore to I John 5:14-15, we have to make sure, through the written and/or the spoken word of God what is the will of God about the things that we are asking of Him. If what we are asking of Him is in alignment with His will, we can be sure that it will come to pass as we trust Him. If however, it is not in alignment with God's will, then I John 5:14-15 makes clear that fortunately this will not happen.

5. "Asking in faith"

We examined previously James 1:5 that speaks about asking God for wisdom. Continuing in the same passage we read:

James 1:5-8

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. **But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways"**

As we saw in the previous parts, for someone to receive from God, it is needed i) to ask Him and ii) what he asks to be in alignment with His will. Now, in addition to these, a third condition that is added here is faith. As the above passage tells us if a man is not asking God in faith he is not going to receive anything from Him. Now regarding the meaning of faith, the phrase «but let him ask in faith with no doubting» (James 1:6) puts faith and doubt in opposition. Thus, when we trust God we have faith and when we doubt Him we lack it. Faith therefore is the trust we have in God and by which we give Him the permission to act in our lives. The lack of faith does not minimize the power of God to help us. God has the same power either we have faith or not. Yet, whether we will permit Him to utilize His power in our lives depends on our trust towards Him. You don't open your door to someone if you do not trust him. Similarly, you don't permit God to get in and act if you do not trust Him, i.e. if you don't believe Him.

As Matthew 13:58 characteristically tells us, when Christ went to his own country, "he did not do many mighty works there BECAUSE OF THEIR UNBELIEF". Of course Christ was able to do the same works there as he did anywhere else. Yet the people of that area didn't permit this, because of their unbelief.

Turning now to the magnitude of faith that is needed to receive from God, Matthew 17:20 makes clear that even the minutest believing is enough for the greatest things. Really there we read:

Matthew 17:20

"if you have faith AS A MUSTARD SEED, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there", and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you»

and Mark 11:24 also tells us:

«Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them»

According to Bullinger and Zodhiates the phrase «mustard seed» «is a proverbial phrase for the smallest particle¹⁶.» Thus, according to Jesus, faith even as little as a mustard seed is enough to move mountains, and bring to pass whatever we ask from God IF (and here there is a very very big IF), as I John 5:14-15 tells us, what we ask is in alignment with the will of God. It is this latter condition that many times is not taken into account, and we worry why we do not receive «whatever things we ask when we pray», though we may both pray and believe for them. However it is not enough to pray and believe for something. It is also needed what you pray and believe TO BE THE WILL OF GOD. If it is really the will of God then even as little believing as a mustard seed is enough to bring it to pass. If it is not however in alignment with the will of God, then even the greatest believing will cause nothing, at least from God's side. Therefore, the equation is not «believing = receiving» but «I believe WHAT I ALREADY KNOW THAT IS THE WILL OF GOD, and I receive it» Hence, faith is not a process by which I persuade myself that I'm going to receive from God anything that may have come in my head. Instead it is my trust in Him, expressed by my acts through which I carry out what I ALREADY KNOW AS HIS WILL. Therefore, even if the Lord tells me that something is not His will and thus I should do nothing, if I really follow His instruction and do nothing, then I have believed Him. First therefore you have the Word, the will, of God (written or spoken) for something and THEN you believe it and act according to what it says.

6. Psalms 64:18

Finally, closing this article I would like to refer to one more reason which, according to the Bible, can make God silent to one's prayers. This is given in Psalms 64:18, where we read:

Psalms 64:18

"If I regard iniquity in my heart, THE LORD WILL NOT HEAR."

As we can see the regard, the respect of iniquity by a man's heart makes God silent to his prayer. As Peter very characteristically told Simon the sorcerer:

Acts 8:21-22

"You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not RIGHT in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your WICKEDNESS.... "

God is interested in the HEART, for only there He can dwell. If a heart is not upright in His eyes but wicked, then it is certainly not an appropriate place for Him. As Proverbs 15:29 tells us:

Proverbs 15:29

"The Lord is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous"

¹⁶See E.W.Bullinger: «A Critical Lexicon and concordance to the English and Greek New Testament», Zondervan Publishing House, 1975, p. 513 και Spiros Zodhiates: «The Complete Word Study Dictionary», AMG Publishers, 1993 p. 1290

Of course there are wicked and evil people out there. And the reason that I added this part is because some of them may sometime cross our way. Thus if someone tells you that He doesn't receive from the Lord, a possible reason (but not the only one) is because in his heart there may be iniquity and wickedness, and God does not hear such persons.

6. Conclusion

In this article we examined the topic of cares, as well as what the Word of God says about it. As we saw: God wants us to care for nothing but to cast all our cares upon Him through prayer. In addition to this, we also saw that there should be agreement between what we ask of God and His good, acceptable and perfect will. God does not have nor He gives second rate things to us. His will is perfect, and what He has for us is PERFECT too (James 1:17). To conclude therefore:

Proverbs 3:5-8

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your path. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones. "

Anastasios Kioulachoglou

Articles

- **Surrender it to the Lord**
- **Patience**
- **John 20:19**

Surrender it to the Lord

I know there may be times that we may feel our hearts burdened. A shuttered dream, an external pressure, a threat or other similar things can have - if we do not handle them properly - a negative impact on our lives. The fact that burdens and pressures may indeed be a reality in a Christian's life is evident from the fact that God has anticipated in His Word a way to face them. It is this way that we will try to present today.

1. God: He that sustains

To start we will go to Psalms 55:22. There we read:

Psalms 55:22

«**Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you;** He shall never permit the righteous to be moved»

The Word of God exhorts us to cast our burden on the Lord. This immediately tells us two things. First, that though Christians, life is not going to be without burdens. Second, that the right way to face any burden, small or big, is **to cast it on the Lord**. This is also further confirmed by I Peter 5:7, where we read:

I Peter 5:6-7

«Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time: **casting all your anxiety upon Him; for He cares for you**»

God prompts us to cast all our anxiety on Him, for as He says, HE cares for us. It is probably not accidental the reference to humility that precedes this passage. It really requires humility to deny that there is anything that we can do and cast all things on God who, as Romans 8:32 tells us:

Romans 8:32

«He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, **how shall He not with him also freely give us all things?**»

As we also read in Psalms 37:3-5

Psalms 37:3-5

«Trust in the Lord and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. **Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. COMMIT YOUR WAY TO THE LORD, TRUST ALSO IN HIM AND HE SHALL BRING IT TO PASS**..... Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him;»

and Proverbs 3:5-6

«Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and **lean not on your own understanding**; In all your ways acknowledge **Him** and **He** shall direct your paths.»

These are not mere words, though we may have read them many times. Instead they are the words OF GOD, PROMISES THAT ASK FOR OUR TRUST. It is not a matter of whether we have the wisdom and the ability to open our way and carry our burdens. Rather it is a matter of whether we trust the One that has the wisdom and the abilities, the all mighty God, to open the way and carry the burdens for us.

2. Matthew 6

Another teaching of the Word of God regarding the handling of burdens and cares is given by Christ in Matthew 6. There starting from verse 25 we read:

Matthew 6:25-32

«Therefore I say to you **DO NOT WORRY ABOUT YOUR LIFE**; what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, *will He* not much more *clothe* you, O you of little faith? Therefore **DO NOT WORRY**, saying, «What shall we eat? or «What shall we drink?» or «What shall we wear?» For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your Heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.»

See that the text does not say that we should not ask God for our needs. In fact, part of the prayer that the Lord gave to his disciples (known as «the Lord's prayer») was about the physical needs («give us today our daily bread», Matthew 6:11). Therefore what Jesus wants to tell us here is not to stop asking God for the covering of our needs, **BUT TO STOP CARING FOR THEM**. And he continues telling us what we should pursue:

Matthew 6:33-34

«BUT SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND ALL THESE THINGS SHALL BE ADDED TO YOU. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day *is* its own trouble.»

The word «but» in the beginning of the passage, makes a contrast between what precedes it and what follows it. It tells us therefore that instead of giving our attention to cares, we should give it to the kingdom of God and His righteousness. As a result, all the other things that we may need will be added to us. As Christ characteristically replied to the devil when he tempted him:

Matthew 4:4

«Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God»

Even if we have all other things, we will still not have life, if our hearts miss the Word of God. This of course does not mean that we do not need to eat and drink or that we do not have other needs. We just read it that God knows that we need these things. However, our main need, in fact our only need (see Luke 10:38-41), is the need of having the Word of God reigning in our hearts. It is this that we should seek and if we do it all other things that we may probably need will be added to us. It is promised.

Some examples

In order to understand better the practical side of the above, we will have a look at two examples (they are not the only) given in the Bible.

3. Daniel's case.

The first case that we will examine is Daniel's. Daniel was one of those Jews that were taken captives to Babylon and who was eventually placed in the top positions of the kingdom's hierarchy. In fact, as we read in Daniel 6:3 at the time of Darius the Median he was preferred among all the kingdom's governors. This in turn caused the envy of his colleagues who plotted against him, persuading the king to issue a command that forbade for 30 days to ask anything from anyone else apart from the king (Daniel 6:4-8). The penalty for the one that would disobey this command would be to be cast to the den of lions. The reason the plot took this form was not accidental. As verse 5 tells us, these folks knew that the only way to accomplish their aim would be to find something against Daniel «concerning the law of his God». Thus, knowing the love that Daniel had for God, they placed him in a dilemma: either he would stop asking God, as the command required, or he would be made, as they thought, food for the lions. These men therefore tried through this plot to openly interfere to the fellowship Daniel had with God. He now had a choice. Either he would permit this pressure, this threat to infect his heart with anxiety and fear or he would cast it on God leaving the fellowship with Him intact and trusting **HIM** for the whole issue. Verse 10 tells us what he finally chose to do:

Daniel 6:10

«Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down to his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, AS WAS HIS CUSTOM SINCE EARLY DAYS»

Daniel not only continued to pray to God but he also did it as always: with his windows WIDE OPEN! He obviously ignored the threat, or better he didn't try to face it with his own means, as for example by closing the windows, or by trying not to become visible, or by praying in times that no-one would see him, in secret etc. In contrast, he continued His fellowship with God as before. On the other hand, this was exactly what his enemies desired. As we saw, they made their plans on the basis that Daniel would not stop praying and asking God, thus violating the command of the king. Verses 11-16 tells us what these men then did:

Daniel 6:11-16

«Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. And they went before the king, and spoke concerning the king's decree: «Have you not signed a decree that every man who petitions any god or man within thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?» The king answered and said, «The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter.» So they answered and said before the king, «That Daniel, who is one of the captives from Judah, does not show due regard for you, O king, or for the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.» And the king when he heard *these* words, was greatly displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him; and he labored till the going down of the sun to deliver him. Then these men approached the king, and said to the king, «Know, O king, that it is the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed. So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast *him* into

the den of lions. *But* the king spoke, saying to Daniel, «YOUR GOD, WHOM YOU SERVE CONTINUALLY, HE WILL DELIVER YOU»

These men hated Daniel so much that in order to throw him from his position, they deceived even the king. When the king understood what had happened, was very sorry but he couldn't do anything, as the command was impossible to be changed. However, he did something more important: HE TRUSTED IN GOD. Verses 17-23 tells us what finally happened:

Daniel 6:17-23

«Then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed. Now the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; and no musicians were brought before him. Also his sleep went from him. Then the king arose very early in the morning and went in haste to the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, «Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?» Then Daniel said to the king, «O king live for ever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king I have done no wrong before you.» Now the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and **NO INJURY WHATEVER WAS FOUND ON HIM BECAUSE HE BELIEVED IN HIS GOD** »

The last verse gives us the outcome for Daniel and the reason that it occurred. Thus the outcome was that «no injury whatever was found on him» and the reason was that «he believed in his GOD»

It is so easy to read and pass quickly the above, but let's for a minute bring ourselves in Daniel's position. He, as the other men of the Bible, were not supermen. They were men like us, that they also had the choice to believe or not believe God. Are our problems and the threats we may face bigger than the threat that Daniel was facing? He could have died within one minute. «Naturally» speaking, as soon as he was at the bottom of the den he was dead. Yet, Daniel didn't look at his situation «naturally». He looked SUPERNaturally. As the passage tells us «he believed in his God». He trusted God. He could have done one thousand other things. He could have devised one thousand ways to escape from the trap: he could close the windows, he could compromise, he could plead the king. However, instead of all these things, Daniel chose to have faith in God. When he was lead to the den «he believed in his God». When they were casting him into the den, «he believed in his God». The result? «No injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God». The question is not whether there will be difficult times, burdens and cares that will be cast on our shoulders for we know that there will be. Instead, what is the question is how will we handle them? Are we going to keep them on our shoulders or we will cast them all on God? Will we believe in God's ability and power or in ours? Will we look for a solution naturally («I am able», «I have the wisdom»), or supernaturally («God is able», «God give me wisdom»)?

4. Elijah's case

Another example of handling burdens and cares as well as of the ability of God to take care of what we cast on Him, is given in I Kings 17. There in verse 1, Elijah speaks with Ahab the king of Israel:

I Kings 17:1

«And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, «As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word»

Because of all the evil things that were taking place in Israel during Ahab's reign, God would not give rain for a big span of time, that from James 5:17 we know that it was three and half years. This of course meant famine for Israel in which Elijah also lived. There was therefore a need, the need of survival, of food and water, that «naturally» speaking seemed that sooner or later it would be very difficult to be met for Elijah. Did God know that Elijah, his man, needed to eat and drink, and what did He do for this? Verses 2-6 tells us:

I Kings 17:2-6

«Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. And it will be *that* you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.» So he went and did according to the word of the Lord, for he went and stayed by the brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook»

God knows our needs and though it may seem naturally impossible that some of them to be met, He knows to cover them with another way: SUPERNATURALLY. Who really could imagine as a solution to Elijah's need of food that the ravens would bring him what he needed? And yet, here it is written before our eyes. We do not necessarily expect the natural solution, but the solution that comes supernaturally, from God that can do all things possible and impossible. We do not have hope only when it seems that there are solutions, but also when there is nothing visible around us. As with Elijah so with us God knows a way to bring solutions and to answer prayers, that is not restricted by the natural data: he knows the SUPERNATURAL WAY. But let us carry on:

I Kings 17:7-9

«And it happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, «Arise, go to Zarephath, which *belongs* to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.»

The brook is drying. The water finishes. The thirstiness threatens Elijah. What did he do? Nothing, till God gave him wisdom showing to him HIS own solution, the SUPERNATURAL¹⁷ solution, which he also followed:

I Kings 17:10-16

¹⁷ By «supernatural» I mean a solution that comes supernaturally, by God. It is the solution that God has devised, in contrast to the solutions that WE devise (natural).

«So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow *was* there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, «Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink.» And as she was going to get *it*, he called to her and said, «Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.» So she said, «As the Lord your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I *am* gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.» And Elijah said to her, «Do not fear; go *and* do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring *it* to me; and afterward make *some* for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord God of Israel: «The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth.» So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for *many* days. The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke by Elijah»

«Naturally» speaking who could ever imagine all the above? No-one. All the above are impossible. Yet they are impossible «naturally». Not SUPERnaturally. As the Lord said «the things which are impossible with men are possible with God» (Luke 18:27). Everything is possible with God. The greatest, really endless source of power in the whole universe is our God. Let's not turn our eyes around us looking for natural solutions. Let's not restrict the possible ways through which God may act to only what we see around us. For we may see nothing around us or even worse we may see a den with lions or famine and thirstiness. In contrast, let's look ON HIM, waiting for his own solution and counsel, even there where it seems to be no solution. Let's commit our way to the Lord, trust also in Him AND HE SHALL BRING IT TO PASS. We do not know how He will bring it to pass but we do know that he will and this is enough to give us rest on Him even when all around us do not favor it.

Tassos Kioulachoglou.

Patience

In James 1:2-4 we read:

James 1:2-4

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various temptations, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing"
(NKJV-KJV)

To be perfect and complete, we need the perfect work of patience. I would like therefore today, to have a closer look at patience and its importance.

1. Patience: Why do we need it?

To start we will go to Hebrews 12:1-2. There we read:

Hebrews 12:1-2

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us* and **let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith**, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down on the right hand of the throne of God."

There is a race that we should run, and we should run it WITH PATIENCE, looking unto Jesus, who also patiently suffered the cross for the joy that was after it. Really, think of the patience of Christ. He never did evil to anyone. On the contrary, he healed the lame, he raised the dead, he did the will of God in all its greatness. If nothing else, the miracles that he did made void all his persecutors' excuses. Yet, he was persecuted and tortured more than anyone else, to the point of being crucified. Did Christ have reasons to be angry and want to quit because the people that he served behaved to him so terribly? Well, even if he had he never did it. Instead, HE ENDURED. You endure when you consider the aim that you want to accomplish much more worthy than the pain that you are in now. This is what Jesus did. He endured the pain and the humiliation, looking at what would follow, at our salvation that his pain would make available. It is he our bright example of patience and it is he the one that we should look upon, running our race with his patience as an example. As Paul said in I Corinthians 9:24-25:

I Corinthians 9:24-25

"do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain *it*. And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, BUT WE *FOR AN IMPERISHABLE CROWN*."

The reward of our race is not a perishable crown on a perishable body given by a perishable hand. In contrast, it is an IMPERISHABLE crown on an IMPERISHABLE, spiritual, body, given BY AN IMPERISHABLE HAND: the hand of JESUS CHRIST. And Hebrews 12 goes on:

Hebrews 12:3

"For consider him who ENDURED such hostility from sinners against himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls"

And Hebrews 10:35-36

"Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For YOU HAVE NEED OF PATIENCE, SO THAT HAVING DONE THE WILL OF GOD, YOU MAY RECEIVE THE PROMISE: "For yet a little while and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul."

(NKJV-KJV)

Our patience and confidence have great reward. Jesus Christ is coming back with crowns, with rewards to those of us that endured and didn't draw back. Sometimes, we are so brash. We think that here is our permanent home and we are going to stay here forever. However, our true citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). We are men called by God to know Him and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, for the knowledge of whom all else is rubbish (Philippians 3:8). It is he the author and the finisher of our salvation (Hebrews 12:2). It is our home in heavens, our real and permanent home (II Corinthians 5:1). This is the reality, as reality is the prize that we don't see now, yet we endure for it, exactly as the athlete does not see his own prize but he endures and prepares himself to acquire it.

2. Passive patience and fighting patience

Since we speak about patience, I would like to make clear for what kind of patience we speak about. The reason is because there are two kinds of patience: the passive patience and the fighting patience. The passive patience just consumes the time, waiting passively for the end. Such for example is the patience of the prisoners, the captives and generally those that have been captivated in a situation that accept passively.

The opposite of the passive patience is the fighting one, the patience of the fighter who, aiming at the victory, endures all the hardships and wounds that a fight may imply. He may be hurt but he endures everything for the sake of his mission. I believe, it is this kind of patience that God speaks about in His Word. It is not a hopeless, aimless patience that God asks us to have. As we read in Hebrews 12:1-2: "**RUN with patience the race that is set before us, LOOKING unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith**". We are patient, RUNNING (action), a race and LOOKING (action) unto someone: THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE AUTHOR AND FINISHER OF OUR FAITH. God didn't make us prisoners of war nor soldiers that march from time to time and then return to their camps. He made us spiritual marines, in an all out war "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). We don't parade in a friendly ground, but we fight in a real war in the enemy's territory. We are not here just to show off our weapons, to say that we have them, but to USE them in all their terrific power. Of course, as in any war, we may suffer hardships and wounds. But so what? Shall we be afraid of them? Shall we leave the devil to keep us in prison under the threat of the consequences. As far as God is concerned:

II Timothy 2:3

"YOU THEREFORE ENDURE HARDSHIP, AS A GOOD SOLDIER OF JESUS CHRIST"

(NKJV-KJV)

The good soldier endures hardship. For the sake of his mission he is ready to sacrifice everything. He obviously has the mind of his Commander:

Philippians 2:5-11

"LET THIS MIND BE IN YOU WHICH WAS ALSO IN CHRIST JESUS, WHO, BEING IN THE FORM OF GOD, DID NOT CONSIDER IT ROBBERY TO BE EQUAL WITH GOD, BUT MADE HIMSELF OF NO REPUTATION, TAKING THE FORM OF BONDSERVANT, AND COMING IN THE LIKENESS OF MEN. AND BEING FOUND

IN APPEARANCE AS A MAN, HE HUMBLLED HIMSELF AND BECAME OBEDIENT TO *THE POINT OF DEATH*, EVEN THE DEATH OF THE CROSS. Therefore God also has highly exalted him and given him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those in earth, and of those under the earth, and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

The good soldier has the mind of his commander. He is obedient, even to the point of death if it is needed. He has made himself available to his Lord and though he may face hardships, he endures them, looking unto Him.

On the other hand, there is the soldier that is afraid of hardships. In their prospect, he becomes tremulous and he prefers to recede back to the prison. The prison keeper that roars like a lion (I Peter 5:8) terrifies him. He has deceived him to believe that he has some power over him, so that he may hide the truth that "GREATER IS HE WHO IS IN YOU, THAN HE WHO IS IN THE WORLD" (I John 4:4). May this soldier also understand the truth. May he break his chains, the strongholds and the thoughts of the mind (II Corinthians 10:4), that keep him captive in the false security of the prison, and walk out, in the battle, as a good soldier that denying self fights fearlessly and patiently. Yet, no longer with a passive patience, but with a FIGHTING one.

3. Other examples of patience

3.1 The example of the farmer and the seed

Apart from Jesus' example, more examples of patience are given in James 5. There, starting from verse 7 we read:

James 5:7-8

"Therefore be patient, brethren until the coming of the Lord. See *how* the farmer WAITS for the precious fruit of the earth, BEING PATIENT for it until it receives the early and latter rain. YOU ALSO BE PATIENT. Establish your hearts for the coming of the Lord is at hand."

Does the farmer see the fruit for which he labors? NO. However, he expects it. He endures all the toilsome and costly work, so that at the end his farm may produce as much fruit as possible. We would say that the fruit of his farm is in perfect correspondence with his patience. Really, imagine a careless farmer that neglects the necessary works for his farm. Compare now him with one that despite the heat in the summer and the cold in the winter, he takes care of his farm by doing all those toilsome works that the first one avoids. Why does he do it? Because he aims at something that he does not see right then, but for which he endures: **the fruit**. It is this farm that will bring forth much fruit, and it is this good and patient farmer the example that is given to us. As the Lord said in the parable of the sower:

Luke 8:11-15

"Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. But the ones on the rock *are those* who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. Now the ones *that* fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and

are choked with cares, riches and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. But the ones *that* fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, KEEP IT AND BEAR FRUIT WITH PATIENCE"

The Word of God has been sowed into our hearts. As the farmer does not see the fruit of his farm yet he endures for it, so we, as good farmers, we should keep the seed of the Word in our heart WITH PATIENCE. In the parable, the seed was always the same. However, only one farmer was PATIENT. He kept the seed in his farm (heart) and in return he bore much, very much fruit, even a hundredfold (Matthew 13:9). And most important, he bore fruit that lasts forever, in heaven.

3.2 The case of Job

Another example that is given in James 5 is the example of Job. Thus in verse 11 we read

James 5:11

"Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the patience of Job and seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy"
(NKJV-KJV)

The complete story of Job can be read in the respective book. He was tried by the devil with severity. In fact all that a man considers as blessings were taken away from him. His children were murdered. His property was lost. He himself was heavily ill, and his wife scorned him, telling him to curse God and die. And as if these were not enough, he had three friends that though they came to comfort him, they were trying to persuade him that it was his fault that all these were happening to him. Yet, the Bible tells us that Job was patient. As it can be seen at the end of his book, despite all the adversity, Job passed the test of his faith successfully.

Following his example, our faith should not depend on the things we have or on the satisfaction of the things we do not have. Such a faith is a conditional one. In contrast, we should make the Lord responsible for every section of our lives. For Him, we are "COMPLETE IN HIM" NOW (Colossians 2:10)! What is your problem? Your health, your loneliness, the such and such problem? For God you are "COMPLETE IN HIM (Christ)" NOW. Before He give you any other blessing, He pronounced you COMPLETE, because you believed in His Son.

For many churches the blessings one has is a meter of his faith. Thus when something is lost as the health or the property, we find it difficult to help him. We become like Job's friends that instead of comfort offered condemnation. Of course it is lawful to be very blessed in everything. **But our completeness does not depend on how many and how much material blessings we have.** "No good thing will God withhold from those who walk uprightly" (Psalms 84:11) says the Word, and He "has given us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness" (II Peter 1:3). At the end, God restored what Job lost (Job 42:10). Really imagine his gladness when he was healed, when he got back his property double, his children etc. Imagine the gladness of Christ when he saw us confessing him as Lord. Christ suffered the cross, Job lost everything, but none lost his patience, which in turn gave its good fruit.

3.3 The prophets' example

Another example in the epistle of James is the example of the prophets. Thus, in verse 10 we read:

James 5:10

"My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience."

Sometimes we think of the prophets and generally of the people of God for whom we read in the Bible, as supermen. That they could do so much, but we..... However, the truth is different. Really, who of the Old Testament prophets was a son of God as you are (Galatians 4:1-7). Who of them was born again of His incorruptible seed (I Peter 1:23)? Did Paul and Peter or any other man of the New Testament have more than you have? The holy spirit that God gave to them, He gave to you as well. The promise for even greater works than Christ's was not made to some supermen of that age, but to ANYONE THAT BELIEVES IN JESUS CHRIST:

John 14:12

"Most assuredly, I say to you, HE WHO BELIEVES IN ME, THE WORKS THAT I DO HE WILL DO ALSO; AND GREATER *WORKS* THAN THESE HE WILL DO, BECAUSE I GO TO MY FATHER"

Returning to our subject, the prophets are really a very lively example of patience and suffering. Really, think about Jeremiah, Isaiah, Elijah, and the others that instead of relaxing, chose to suffer, to fight, to endure. Instead of governing themselves, they made them a vessel in the hand of their Lord. But also in the New Testament, think about Paul for example. As he says for himself.

II Timothy 3:10

"But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, LONGSUFFERING, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra-WHAT PERSECUTIONS I ENDURED. AND OUT OF *THEM* ALL THE LORD DELIVERED ME. "

Also, II Corinthians 6:4

"But in all *things* we commend ourselves as ministers of God: **IN MUCH PATIENCE**....."

There is a spiritual battle that implies suffering and hardships and we need patience to fight it. As far as Paul is concerned, he said towards the end of his ministry:

II Timothy 4:7-8

"I HAVE FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT, **I HAVE FINISHED THE RACE**, I HAVE KEPT THE FAITH. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that day, and not to me only, but also to all who have loved His appearing."

Christ also said, speaking to God:

John 17:4

"I HAVE FINISHED THE WORK which you have given me to do"

Christ, Paul, the prophets were not masochists that liked suffering. They were WARRIORS, SPIRITUAL MARINES, **that were ready to suffer** and do whatever was necessary for the fulfillment of the mission, for the work of the Ministry. Then it was Paul and the others, today it is we, that we fight the same fight UNDER THE SAME COMMANDER: THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. May we walk like them. May we fight the good fight and finish the race. It is not an easy race, but certainly is the best race we can run and with the best end: the Lord Jesus Christ waiting to honor our patience with the crown of righteousness, exactly as he will do to many others, that through the centuries chose to fight the same fight, denying their own self and putting it under the command of their LORD.

4. Patience: How is it produced?

Having seen how much important is patience, we will close having a look at how it is produced. Thus, in Romans 5:3-5 we read:

Romans 5:3-5

"And not only *that* but we also glory in tribulation, knowing that TRIBULATION PRODUCES PATIENCE; and patience proof, and proof hope. And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the holy spirit which is given to us"

(NKJV-KJV)

And James 1:2-4

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various temptations, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing"

(NKJV-KJV)

Really, who would expect that what we need so much to do the will of God, to be fruitful and run the race i.e. patience, is the result of tribulations and trials? Probably it is because of this reason that both the above passages tell us to glory in tribulation and be joyful in temptations!! For if we remain faithful, then this will produce patience, which in turn will produce proof, hope, perfect work! If therefore we suffer "according to the will of God let's commit our souls to him" - "THE GOD OF PATIENCE AND COMFORT" (Romans 15:5) - "as to a faithful Creator" (I Peter 4:19). Let's submit ourselves to Him and let's allow Him to do to us WHATEVER HE WANTS. "No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier" (II Timothy 2:4) says the Word, and we are soldiers of Jesus Christ. Let's cast therefore all our cares, all "the affairs of this life", on God. "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that so easily ensnares us and **LET US RUN WITH PATIENCE THE RACE THAT IS SET BEFORE US, LOOKING UNTO JESUS, THE AUTHOR AND FINISHER OF OUR FAITH**"

Tassos Kioulachoglou

John 20:19

We will see together some thoughts on John 20:19. I believe it will benefit us much. So there we read:

John 20:19

«The same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, «Peace *be* with you»

1. At the evening

It is easy to have faith when everything is all right. It is painless to speak for the Lord where you feel secure. It is convenient to trust the Lord when there are no difficulties, no obstacles. When you are able to see clearly in your life, when you are able to see ahead, you do not need much faith. When you see you do not need to believe. Everything is so nice at the noon. It is bright and you can trust God. Yet, what do you do when the evening comes? When everything is foggy in your life? When the only that you see is shadows in the night? The darkness makes even the smallest noise to scare you and favors the fears, true or false.

2. When the doors were shut

Then, because of insecurity, you feel the need to protect yourself. To shut the doors behind you. It is fear that makes you to shut the doors. Maybe the doors of your life. There are many people that were never closely connected with another and who fail in their personal relationships. And when light is shed on their past, the cause that had very well been hidden through time becomes evident. Once they trusted, they opened themselves but they were hurt and felt betrayed. Hence they made their decision. Be closed to be protected. A woman cried desperately to her therapist. «Please help me. My failure to love is my hell!» Thus, they are unable to feel the joy of giving and receiving without reservation. Fear makes you to be shut to yourself. To shut the doors behind you. To shut «the doors» of your mouth and not speak for the Lord fearing that you may be mocked. Fear leads you to failure. The church that shuts the doors behind her and keeps the solution for herself does unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). The church succeeds to her destiny when her doors are open. Open to the voice of the Lord, open to communication, open to people's needs, open to His service. When the doors of the church are shut, the world understands a handless God, an indifferent Creator that does not interfere (Isaiah 60:11).

3. Where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews

It is good the disciples of the Lord to be assembled. But that assembly was different. All that were gathered there were trembling. They were trembling from guilt that they abandoned the Lord, from fear of the Jews and above all they were trembling because they believed that what they had trusted in had been demolished. A negative assembly for a negative reason. When you think negatively you sink. Thus the judgment started. The fight about who was responsible. The others would blame Peter for his boastfulness in the supper and Peter would rebuke them for their flight. When you lose your trust in the Lord you

always try to find a responsible for your situation. All are wrong except you. When you lose your trust and faith it is convenient to be victim and blame others for it. But in all this a hopeful phrase: JESUS CAME.

Praise the Lord! Even if the passage ended here we would know that the end was good. Fortunately, the Lord comes even when the doors of our life are locked. What a wonderful phrase. Jesus came. Now everything will be in order. The Lord came. He didn't come to blame. He didn't accuse anyone but he gave them the solution. He said: «Peace be with you». Whatever was blocking you let it go away. For «peace be with you». It is not important what happened. What is important is what I can bring in your life. Peace be with you. He could stand there as a simple spectator, watching the fight and giving right and wrong. But the Lord came and said «peace be with you». It is not time for fear and fights. AND HE STOOD IN THE MIDST.

Hallelujah. He stood in the midst because he is the center of our worship. Moreover, he is our joining ring. He joins me and you. We may not match as characters but Jesus Christ joins us for he stands IN THE MIDST. With his one hand holds me and with the other holds you. Many things separates us but what joins us is more powerful! And if we believe and live this last phrase then the countdown starts. Yes! FAITH-PEACE-UNITY and OPEN DOORS in our lives for a joyful walk with Him.

Amen

Thanasis Papadopoulos.

Articles

- **Before, Now and After**
- **In God's Presence**
- **The Word of God is:**

Before, now and after

Surely, there may have been times that we all have wondered about our destiny and the reason of our presence in this world. Why are we on this earth? What is the purpose of our presence in this world? What are the thoughts of God about us? Today, I would like to see with you what the Word of God says about questions as the above, so that we may appreciate better the true answers that it gives.

1. Chosen before the foundation of the world

To start we will go to Ephesians 1:3-6. There we read:

Ephesians 1:3-6

«Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as HE CHOSE US IN HIM BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD, THAT WE SHOULD BE HOLY AND WITHOUT BLAME BEFORE HIM IN LOVE, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the beloved»

God chose us in Christ BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. The fact that we are here and we know God is therefore not «accidental». God foreknew us (Romans 8:29), and **before the foundation of the world** He chose us in Christ to be HIS CHILDREN, holy and without blame before Him.

2. Psalms 139:1-16

The Lord's involvement concerning our presence in this world, is also evident from Psalm 139. There, starting from verse 13, we read:

Psalms 139:13-16

«**YOU made my whole being; YOU formed me in my mother's body.** I praise you because you made me in an amazing and wonderful way. Your works are wonderful. I know this very well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, **your eyes saw my unformed body.** **All the days planned for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.**»
[NIV-New Century Version]

God had seen us, before we were born. All the days planned for us were written in His book while still nothing of them had happened. His eyes saw our unformed body and HE gave us the shape and the form we have. He made us in an amazing and wonderful way. His works are all wonderful and we are one of them.

But Psalm 139 does not stop there. Taking it from the beginning we read:

Psalms 139:1-3

«O Lord, you have searched me and known *me*. You know my sitting down and my rising up; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you

are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord.»

The Lord knows everything about us. He understands our thoughts from afar and there is nothing hidden from Him. All that we do, and all that we think are fully known to Him. And the same Psalm continues:

Psalm 139:5-12

«You have hedged me behind, and before; you have laid your hand upon me. *Such* knowledge *is* too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you *are* there; If I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, «Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,» even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day for darkness is as light to You.»

God has hedged us behind and before and His hand is laid upon us. Each one of us is a man that GOD chose, GOD formed, and for whom GOD cares and knows everything, even our sitting down and rising up. He is with us always and there is no place where He is not. As Paul says in Romans 8:38-39

Romans 8:38-39

«For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.»

There is absolutely nothing that is able to separate us from God's love. He loved us so much that He gave His own Son, Jesus Christ. No wonder therefore that Romans 8:32 says:

Romans 8:32

«He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?»

Really, would it ever be possible that God would spare anything good for us when He didn't spare His own Son? Would it ever be possible to leave us for example? Who of us would leave something that he loves so much and for which he paid such a high price? And if we would, He will never. As He says in Hebrews 13:5

Hebrews 13:5

«I will never leave you nor forsake you»

and also Isaiah 49:15

«I WILL NOT FORGET YOU.»

God will never leave us nor forsake us. He will never forget us, and there is nothing that can separate us from His love. He cares for each one of us PERSONALLY. For us He went so far as to give even His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Psalm 139:17-18

But Psalm 139 does not stop here. Continuing from verse 17 we read:

Psalms 139:17-18

«How precious are your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would **outnumber the grains of the sand**;»

And Psalms 40:5

«Many, O Lord my God, *are* your wonderful works *which* you have done; and **your thoughts toward us cannot be recounted to you in order; if I would declare and speak of them they are more than can be numbered**;»

God's thoughts for us are precious and their number is countless: THEY OUTNUMBER THE GRAINS OF THE SAND! And as He says for them in Jeremiah 29:11

Jeremiah 29:11

«I know the thoughts that I think towards you, says the Lord, **thoughts of peace and not of evil**;»

The thoughts of the Lord for us are thoughts of good and peace. We are not in His mind just for a few minutes in which He makes some spontaneous thoughts concerning us. We were in His mind **before the foundation of the world**. His thoughts for us **outnumber any number and nothing can separate us from His love**. Thus, as Hebrews 13:5-6 tells us:

Hebrews 13:5-6

«For He Himself has said, «I will never leave you nor forsake you.» **So we may boldly say: «The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?»**»

And as Proverbs counsels us:

Proverbs 3:5-6

«Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.»

Let us trust in the Lord with all our heart and leave HIM to direct us. He has not promised that storms will never come. However, He knows how to calm them. In the great storm that hit the boat with the disciples in Mark 4:37, it was enough a «Be still» of the Lord to the sea and «there was a great calm». When a storm comes, when tribulation arrives, He knows not only to bring calmness but also to use the tribulation for our benefit, «knowing that tribulation produces patience; and patience, experience; and experience hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the holy spirit which is given to us» (Romans 5:3-5)

4. Sited in the heavenlies

But the Lord's vision concerning us is not only about this small life. In fact, as I Peter 2:11 tells us, we are but strangers and foreigners here. And as Philippians 3:20-21 says:

Philippians 3:20-21

«For our citizenship IS IN HEAVEN, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself»

Our real home is in heavens. There we belong, and there is our true citizenship. It is there that God sees already, sited together with the Lord Jesus Christ:

Ephesians 2:4-7

«But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), AND RAISED US UP TOGETHER, AND MADE US SIT TOGETHER IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES IN CHRIST JESUS»

From God's point of view, we are already sited in the heavenlies, together with Christ. HE is our vision and the one to whom we should look at. As it says in Hebrews 12:1-2

Hebrews 12:1-2

«let us run with patience the race that is set before us, **looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith**, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.»

To run a race consistently we need to have a clear vision of what we want to attain and the purpose we run. Otherwise, we will be running «with uncertainty», «as one who beats the air» (I Corinthians 9:26). We can run our race consistently only by looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our salvation. We are here TO DO THE WILL OF GOD. WHAT HE SAYS IN HIS WORD AND WHAT HE HAS CALLED EACH ONE OF US TO DO. THIS IS THE REASON THAT WE LIVE AND THE PURPOSE OF OUR LIFE. We are followers of Jesus Christ and as He confirms us: «He who follows me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life» (John 8:12)

Conclusion

As it may be clear from the above, we are not people that just happened to be here, without a purpose to live. God foreknew us and He chose us in Christ BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD. He has chosen YOU and it was HE that formed you and gave you the shape that you have. As with all His works, you are WONDERFUL too. He was personally engaged in your formation and He saw your body before it was formed. All the days planned for you were written in His book while nothing of them had still happened. You are not accidental in this world. You are not part of a crowd but a wonderful creation of God. You are a child of God chosen from Him before the world began. God is with you, hedging you behind and before and there is no place that you are and He is not. God loves YOU, PERSONALLY, my friend, and He loves you so much that nothing can separate you from His love. His thoughts for you are countless. They outnumber any number. His

presence is not a matter of feelings but an unchanged reality. God is not with you when you feel it and He disappears when you do not feel it. He is with you either you feel it or not. He loves you either you feel worthy of His love or not. You are His child regardless of how much you feel it. This is what God's Word, the TRUTH, says and truth is independent of feelings. He has given you eternal life and you are going to be with Him forever! Though others may just flow in the stream of life, aimlessly and without purpose, you have a purpose: **TO DO THE WILL OF YOUR FATHER. TO DO WHAT IT PLEASES HIM.** To run the race consistently concentrating not on the things of this earth, but on the things of above from where your savior, **THE LORD JESUS CHRIST**, is coming. There you belong, and there you will be forever.

Tassos Kioulachoglou

In God's Presence

«In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth (Genesis 1:1)» and after speaking into existence the whole Universe and every living creature....

«God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them..." (Genesis 1:26-27)

God created man, His ultimate and so dear masterpiece and placed him right in His presence. Think about it ! The whole Universe created HE, for man to dwell in His presence!

I John 1:5

«This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.»

GOD IS LIGHT

I John 4:8

«He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.»

GOD IS LOVE

The Lord God Almighty by/in/through His perfect love gave man freedom of will, the freedom to choose and man chose to question His Creator, thus resulting in

Genesis 3:8

«And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.»

They left from God's very presence. However, would God ever give up on His most precious among the whole creation? NEVER. The plan was ready and the promise for victory over sin - man's isolation from Him-darkness, evil and death come just 7 verses later

Genesis 3:15

«And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.» (plz note that the first usage of the word "BRUISE" in this verse, is in the text really, the word, SMASH/CRASH)

So Satan's head crashed. It is done in the spiritual, with our Lord's resurrection and it will be manifested in its all glorious fulness, at God's perfect timing:

2 Peter 3:9

«The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.»

Let's look at some verses:

Revelation 21:10-11

«And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.

Revelation 21:22

And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

Revelation 21:24

And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it.

Revelation 22:3

«And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him»

INTO GOD'S PRESENCE

Man started into God's presence and it is where he will be forever and ever. BUT WHAT ABOUT NOW? WHAT ABOUT TODAY?

Psalm 118:24

«This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.»

God rescued us, delivered us, redeemed us, calls us back in His very presence by His grace. **Right now!** Let's see what it is like to be in His presence.

Psalms 100:2

«Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing.»

1 Chronicles 16:26-27

«For all the gods of the people are idols: but the LORD made the heavens. Glory and honor are in his presence; strength and gladness are in his place.»

Psalms 16:11

«Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.»

Psalms 95:2

«Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms.

There is Joy, Glory and Honor, and PRAISES.....PRAISES.. PRAISES, into God's presence, there is Thanksgiving....

Acts 3:19

«Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord»

We need to ask God to cleanse us, to enter into His presence. Through confession and repentance that lead us to God's forgiveness, God is blessing us, to have boldness and access to His throne, His very throne, His very presence

1 Corinthians 1:29-31

«That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.»

HUMBLENESS: there is no room for glory but unto the Lord God Almighty.

GOD calls us today to come into His presence.

GOD is Who will lead us into His holy of holies.

GOD is Who will teach us how to approach and praise Him.

GOD is Who gives us the faith on His promises and His truth.

GOD is Who cleanses us with His undeserved forgiveness, so we can with boldness stand before our Lord.

Our part is to trust in Him in all humbleness, to lean on Him to carry us, to give Him our hearts, so that He will guide them closer and closer and as close as it gets to Him. It is His will.

Our part is to surrender to our Mighty, Loving Master and our respond to His calling is to be: "Here I am Lord, I am yours."

We are nothing but when in HIM.

We know nothing but by HIS wisdom.

We can do nothing but by HIS might and He is calling us to claim His promises. So ask!! Ask Him to take you into His presence. He is **FAITHFUL**.

Matthew 7:7-8

«Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened»

We don't have to "know how". He only asks from us to seek His presence. He is so faithful and longing for His precious children to seek Him more and more. Surrender to Him! Focus on Him, find time for your Creator!

Jude 24-25

«Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

AMEN!

God bless you child of God, NOW is the time to press on and seek His very presence!

Zoe Hadjiantoniou

The Word of God is:

II Timothy 3:16-17 is a passage of fundamental importance for the understanding of the identity and usefulness of the Bible. It says there:

II Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture *IS* given by inspiration of God, **and *IS*** profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

(NKJV-KJV)

In this passage I have given special emphasis to the word "is" that is used there and which, as we all probably know, is used to identify, characterise or describe something. According therefore to the above passage, the Bible or Scripture *IS* given by inspiration of God or, as the Greek reads, is God-breathed¹⁸. This means that author of the Bible is God who breathed it, produced it, and therefore the Bible is the Word of God. Apart from this, the above passage also tells us that the Bible *IS* useful, counting four reasons that make it useful. More analytically, it tells us that the Bible is useful for teaching, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. Thus, and since the title of this article is: "The Word of God is", we have already some things that this Word is. The first of these regards the identification of the God-breathed Word with the Bible, while the second the usefulness of this Word for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

¹⁸For a more detailed examination of II Timothy 3:16 see: Biblical Insights, Vol.1, Iss.1. January 1996.

However, these are not the only things that the Word of God is. Below we will consider some additional things that it is, that will also help us to appreciate its worth and usefulness better.

1. God's Word: what God has magnified most

I believe that there wouldn't be any better way to start this survey than by hearing the opinion that God has for His Word. To see this opinion we will go to Psalms 138:2. There we read:

Psalm 138:2

"For you [referring to God] have magnified your Word above all your name"

According to this passage, God has magnified His Word even above all His name. Bearing in mind, that there isn't something higher than God, whom His name express, we can easily understand that what God wants to tell us here is that He has magnified His Word above everything else. If we want therefore a right evaluation of the worth of the Word of God, here is the evaluation that God Himself has made: **for Him there isn't something worthier than His Word.**

2. God's Word: food for life

Having seen the top position that God has given to His Word, let's move ahead to see some other things that this Word is, starting from Matthew 4:4. There Jesus Christ said:

Matthew 4:4

"It is written, "MAN SHALL NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE....."

Many people think that bread and generally physical food is the only thing they need to live. Though it is true that physical food is needed to survive and to satisfy the physical hunger, yet, according to Jesus Christ, there is something else that is needed to make our lives something more than a simple survival. What is this? The answer is given in the same verse:

Matthew 4:4

"It is written, "MAN SHALL NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE BUT BY EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD"

According to this passage, to make your life a real abundant life and not just a survival, you need "every word that proceeds from the mouth of God", i.e. you need the Word of God. As I Peter 2:2 tells us:

I Peter 2:2

"as new-born babes, desire the pure milk of the WORD, that you may grow thereby"

The new-born babes cannot live without milk. They get up from their sleep and cry because they want milk. Similarly, as the new-born babes cannot do without milk so our lives cannot do without the milk of the Word of God. We don't have to decide whether we need the milk of the Word or not. It is a FACT that we need it. As it is a fact that to physically survive

we need to eat something, so it is A FACT, an unaltered reality, that in order to really live we need the Word of God.

3. God's Word: the truth

After we saw that the Word of God is as necessary for our lives as the milk for a newborn baby, let's move ahead to see what else this Word is. What we are going to read happened during the investigation of Jesus by Pilate (John 18:33-38). During this investigation Pilate made one question that has probably been asked by many people since then. Pilate's question was made in response to Jesus saying that he came to the world to bear witness to the truth (John 18:37), and can be found in John 18:38:

John 18:38

"Pilate said to him [Jesus] , **"What is truth?"**"

Pilate's question is not at all uncommon. Many people, and in fact many of us, may have asked it in some stage of our lives. It is vital therefore to find the answer to this question. This answer is given in John 17. There, Jesus Christ, just little before his arrest prayed to God and said:

John 17:14, 17

"I have given them [the disciples] Your word....Sanctify them in Your word. **YOUR WORD IS TRUTH**"

The answer to the truth-question is very simple and plain: **THE WORD OF GOD IS TRUTH**. The Bible, being the Word of the one true God, is the truth upon which we can base our lives without any fear that we will be ever let down. It is this Word that speaks about Jesus Christ, "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6) and the wonderful things that he accomplished for us. It is this Word that says that if you confess the Lord Jesus and believe that God raised him from the dead you will be saved (Romans 10:9). This is not just a positive word. It is not another religious word. It is the **TRUTH**. If you do it you will certainly be saved and if you don't do it you will certainly continue to be without salvation. The truth is truth. You cannot change it. You cannot alter it. It is **UNALTERED**. You can either accept it or reject it.

On the contrary, the lie has thousands of facets. Hundreds of ideas, philosophies and religions are going around claiming a position in our minds. A lifetime's period may be enough to count the birth and death of dozens of them. Man needs to continuously update his philosophies and theories to be "in accordance" with time. Had they been truth they wouldn't need updating. The truth is truth today, tomorrow and after a thousand or a million years. And it is only **THE WORD OF GOD**, the truth, that has this eternal duration. As I Peter 1:23 says:

"having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, **THROUGH THE WORD OF GOD WHICH LIVES AND ABIDES FOREVER**"

Also: I Peter 1:25

"**BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER**. Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you."

The Word of God endures forever. It doesn't need updating. The God that backed up this Word two thousands years ago, is the same God today as well. As James 1:17 says:

James 1:17

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, **WITH WHOM THERE IS NO VARIATION OR SHADOW OF TURNING**"

Sometimes just few minutes are enough for men to change their minds. "Variations" and "turnings" are so frequent with men. But with GOD there is no variation and not even the slightest shadow of turning. God's Word being truth and backed up by a God that doesn't change is certainly the surest foundation for our lives and the only thing upon which we can lean without any fear that we will be ever let down.

4. God's Word: a pure Word.

One of the characteristics that truth by definition has is purity. The question therefore is: is the Word of God pure and if yes how much pure is it? To see the answer to this question we will go to the book of Psalms. There we read:

Psalms 12:6

"The words of the Lord *are* **PURE WORDS, like silver tried in a furnace of the earth, purified seven times**"

Psalms 119:140

"YOUR WORD *IS* **VERY PURE**; therefore your servant loves it"

The Word of God is not a word with impurities. It is not a word for which you have to apologise for its "mistakes" nor a word that needs to be refined before usage. Instead, it is a PURE word and in fact so much pure "as silver tried in a furnace of the earth, purified seven times" i.e. it couldn't be purer. That's why we love it ("THEREFORE [as a result] your servant loves it"). Its purity, perfection and accuracy really reflects the purity, perfection and accuracy of its author: GOD

5. God's Word: the source of rejoicing

We have already seen quite a few things that the Word of God is. However, the list does not stop here. In Psalms 119 we learn for another effect that this Word has:

Psalms 119:162

"I REJOICE at your Word as one who finds great treasure"

Also: Psalms 119:14

"I HAVE REJOICED in the way of your testimonies as *much as* in all riches"

Many people try to find rejoicing through the possession of great amounts of money. However, as we saw you cannot live with bread alone, and money is not and cannot buy the ingredient that can give you real life and real rejoicing. What is this ingredient? The Word of God. The Word of God, apart from all the things that by now we have seen that it is, it also brings great rejoicing. In fact, it brings so much rejoicing as the rejoicing of the one "who

finds a great treasure". You don't need to earn the lottery to rejoice. What you need is just to go to the Word, study it, believe it and keep it in your heart. Every time that you do that your rejoicing will be so great as the rejoicing of the one who finds a great treasure. Isn't really marvelous that we have such a constant source of rejoicing! It is not a rejoicing dependant on the conditions, the "luck" or other things but on God and His wonderful Word, the Bible.

6. God's Word: A lamp to our feet

Another thing that the Word of God is, can be found in Psalms 119:105 and II Peter 1:19 It says there:

Psalms 119:105

"YOUR WORD IS A LAMP TO MY FEET AND A LIGHT TO MY PATH"

Also II Peter 1:19

"And so we have the prophetic word¹⁹ more sure, WHICH YOU DO WELL TO HEED AS A LIGHT THAT SHINES IN A DARK PLACE, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts"

(NKJV-KJV)

To walk in a path you necessary need light. Either the light is physical or artificial, the fact is that without it you cannot walk. The path of life is not an exception to this rule. To walk in this path you need light to lighten it. Where are you going to find this light? According to the above passages, the answer is to the Word of God. By following the Word of God, you will be walking in a path full of light. As Psalms 84:11 and I John 1:5 say:

Psalms 84:11

"For the Lord God *IS* A SUN..."

I John 1:5

"GOD IS LIGHT AND IN HIM IS NO DARKNESS AT ALL."

God is like a sun²⁰. Following therefore His Word is like following a path lighten by as much light as the light of its author, i.e. as the light of God.

7. If the Word is not our delight.....

Probably you understand better the significance of something when you become aware of what would happen if you didn't have it. In the above we exposed some of the things that the Word of God is and therefore we can easily understand by them, what we would lose if we didn't have it. In Psalms however, there is a passage that does not speak in terms of the benefits from the Word but in the converse way i.e. in terms of what will happen if the Word is not our delight. In Psalms 119:77, David said by revelation:

¹⁹The "prophetic word" or the "word of the prophecy" (KJV), is the Word of God. For more on this, see: Biblical Insights, Vol.1, Iss.1, January 1996.

²⁰However, though the sun has some dark spots on its surface, in God there is NO DARKNESS AT ALL.

Psalms 119:77
 "your law *is* my delight"

For David, the Word of God (the "law" in David's time and administration) was his delight. To see now what would happen if the Word was not his delight, we don't have but to go just fifteen verses ahead. Indeed, verse 92 tells us:

Psalms 119:92
 "UNLESS YOUR LAW *HAD BEEN* MY DELIGHT, I WOULD THEN HAVE PERISHED IN MY AFFLICTION"

Sometimes difficult periods may come, in which there may be some temporal, light affliction (II Corinthians 3:17 and I Peter 1:6). However, this does not mean that in those times the Word of God stops to be the constant source of rejoicing, the lamp to our feet, and the food for our lives. There is no situation, no circumstance that can make the Word less bright than it is or make it lose its value. God is the same powerful and loving God both in good and in bad situations. His Word is the same trustworthy Word both in good and in bad situations. However, WE have to take care so that we continue to keep the flame of the Word always alive into our hearts. Sadness, pressure and affliction may sometimes come but they will not manage to overtake us as long as the Word of God is our delight. God is a faithful God and He will always make us more than conquerors as we trust in Him (Romans 8:37)

8. If we meditate in the Word of God we will be....

Having seen some of the things that the Word of God is, they should already be clear the great benefits that we will have by studying and putting this Word deep into our hearts. However, let's also see some more of the results that this Word will have if we meditate in it i.e. if we make it the focus of our mind and thoughts.

8.1. Blessed and like a tree planted by the waters.

To see what the Word predicts for the man that makes it the focus of his mind let's go to Psalms 1:1-3. There it says:

Psalms 1:1-3
 "BLESSED *is* the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; BUT HIS DELIGHT *IS* IN THE LAW OF THE LORD AND IN HIS LAW HE MEDITATES DAY AND NIGHT. **He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.**"

Is there any of us that does not want whatever he does to prosper? I don't think so. However, how can we obtain this? According to the above passage the way is to meditate in the Word of God. If we rightly divide the Word of God and make it the focus of our mind, then whatever we will do, will be pleasing to God since it will come from a mind in which God's Word possesses the central position and thus, according to the above passage, it shall be prosperous and we shall also be "blessed" ("happy") and like FRUITFUL trees planted by the rivers of water.

8.2. Prosperous and prudent

The effects of the meditation in the Word of God are made even clearer by having a look in the book of Joshua. Joshua was the successor of Moses in the leadership of the people of Israel, as they were on their way to the promised land. Bearing in mind that it was he that would lead the Israelites to the promised land, and also knowing, by reading the relative records²¹ that they weren't the easiest people to lead, we can easily understand how much Joshua needed prosperity and prudence to carry out his heavy responsibilities. It is interesting therefore to see what God advised him to do, so that he may have this prosperity and prudence. To see it let's go to Joshua 1:5-8. There, God was speaking to Joshua and said:

Joshua 1:5-8

"No man shall *be able to* stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. **Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may OBSERVE TO DO ACCORDING TO ALL THAT IS WRITTEN IN IT. FOR THEN YOU WILL MAKE YOUR WAYS PROSPEROUS AND THEN YOU WILL HAVE GOOD SUCCESS** [Hebrew: "sakal" meaning to be circumspect, prudent, to have understanding, wisdom, to prosper. See number 7919 in Strong's concordance. The LXX reads "and then shalt thou be wise²²"]

See how wonderfully God encouraged Joshua. God is not someone that stays afar without understanding the encouragement and the comfort that we may need. Instead He is a loving caring God. See also what He told Joshua. He told him that in order to **always** ("wherever you go") prosper, he had to be very courageous to do according to all that the law of Moses (the Word of God of that age and administration) commanded. In fact, He told him to be careful and not turn away from what this law said. He furthermore told him that only if he meditated in the Word day and night, i.e. only if the Word of God was continuously the focus of his mind, he would prosper and would act prudently. These "THEN" that are used in the passage show that his prosperity and prudence was conditional upon the position of the Word of God in his mind. It is really only if the Word of God is the centre of our thoughts and acts, that we will have prosperity and prudence. As the reader may confirm by reading the remaining of Joshua, Joshua was indeed a man that followed and served God throughout all his life, and he was indeed prosperous and prudent in his task.

9. Conclusion

Having finished this study, we have to say that it was by no means exhaustive. The reader is advised to search the Word of God and find for himself other things that it is.

²¹See for example: Exodus 15:22-26, 16:1-5, Numbers 11:1-6, 16, 25:1-5, Deutoronomy 1.

²²See: The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament with an English translation, Samuel Bagster and Sons, London, 1879

However, I believe that we have already seen a lot of things that will help us in our appreciation of the Word of God. Summarizing now all the above, we saw that the Word of God, the Bible, is:

- i) the truth,
- ii) the most magnified thing of God,
- iii) food for life,
- iv) milk for growth,
- v) the source of rejoicing,
- vi) lamp to our feet,
- vii) useful for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness,
- viii) very pure,
- ix) the thing that if we make it our delight we will not be overtaken in our affliction,
- x) the thing in which if we meditate, we will be:
 - a) blessed,
 - b) like a tree planted by the rivers of water
 - c) prosperous in everything we do,
 - d) we prudent.

Though this list is not exhaustive, it is enough I believe to show us the greatness, the importance and the worth of the Word of God. It is also enough to make clear the wonderful effects that this Word will have in our lives if we study it, put it in our hearts and keep it there alive.

Tassos Kioulachoglou

Articles

- **Obedience**
- **Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Daniel 3:16-18)**
- **All things work together for good to those that love God (Part II) - The case of Joseph**

Obedience

In this article we will consider the topic of obedience. To start we will go to Romans 6:15-18. There we read:

Romans 6:15-18

«What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that **to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey**, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness? But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet **you obeyed from the heart** that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin you became slaves of righteousness.»

According to this passage, one is the servant of the one he obeys, with two possibilities available: either, by obeying sin, he will be a servant of sin, or, by obeying **from the heart** God and His doctrine, he will be a servant of righteousness. In other words, it is impossible for one to truly serve God if his heart does not obey Him. It really doesn't matter how active we may be in religious activities. What matters is how OBEIDENT we are to Him, for it is our obedience and the one we obey that determines the one we serve in reality. As James 4:7-8 tells us:

James 4:7-8

«Therefore SUBMIT TO GOD. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. DRAW NEAR TO GOD AND HE WILL DRAW NEAR TO YOU. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded»

We need to draw near to God, so that He draw near to us. We cannot serve Him from distance, without knowing Him. We can serve only the one we obey and to whom we subject ourselves. As it says in Philippians 2:5-11:

Philippians 2:5-11

«LET THIS MIND BE IN YOU WHICH WAS ALSO IN CHRIST JESUS, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and **BECAME OBEIDENT TO THE POINT OF DEATH, EVEN THE DEATH OF THE CROSS**. Therefore God also has highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth; and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.»

The same mind that was in Christ Jesus should also be in us. What was this mind? IT WAS THE MIND OF OBEIDENCE, THE MIND THAT, OBEYING GOD, DIDN'T DENY EVEN THE DEATH OF THE CROSS. It was the mind of the garden of Gethsemane:

Matthew 26:36-39, 42

«Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, «Sit here while I go and pray over there.» And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and he began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then he said to them, «My

soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with me.» He went a little farther and fell on his face, and prayed saying, «O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; **NEVERTHELESS, NOT AS I WILL, BUT AS YOU WILL**.....Again, a second time, he went away and prayed, saying, «O My Father, **if this cup cannot pass away from me unless I drink it, Your will be done**.»

The mind of Jesus Christ, the mind of obedience, was «NOT AS I WILL, BUT AS YOU WILL». This is the mind that the Word of God tells us to have. Not as we will, but as God wills. It is easy to be obedient when everything is going our way. When God gives us what our heart desires, we receive it with great gladness. However, what do we do when this does not happen? How do we react when the plans of the Lord seem to divert from our own plans? Here is the difference between the obedient and the disobedient. In happiness, both they will react the same. It is not happiness that causes the people of the second category of the parable of the good sower to fall. In contrast, as Jesus said, «they receive the Word WITH JOY» (Luke 8:13). Yet, this doesn't last. In the first tribulation, they fall away (Matthew 13:21, Luke 8:13). When a choice of the Lord is not what he would like, the disobedient will run away, while the obedient will stay, saying: «if it is possible nevertheless, not as I will but as you will».

1. Obedience is better than sacrifice

In I Samuel there is a well known story: the story of Saul's rise and fall in the kingdom of Israel. Saul was appointed by God to be the first king of Israel. In the beginning, he was humble. In fact, in the day of his proclamation as a king he was hiding from the people (I Samuel 10:22)! However, his humility didn't last much. Soon it was turned to pride and haste for action, under the leading of the people, instead of submission to the leading of the Lord. In I Samuel 13 we see his first rebellion: Saul and the people waited for Samuel to come for the sacrifice, while the Philistines were ready for fight in the other side. Yet, Samuel was late. Seeing this, Saul did what he should not have done: he offered the sacrifice himself. The obedient waits for God and keeps His commandments, whatever the cost may be. On the other hand, the disobedient is obedient as far as the things are going OK. Nevertheless, when the status changes, then he takes the things in his own hands. He thinks that he waited much and at the end of the day he has to do something. Samuel came exactly when Saul had finished with the sacrifice. However, he didn't bring him good news.

I Samuel 13:13-14

«And Samuel said to Saul, You have done foolishly: **YOU HAVE NOT KEPT THE COMMANDMENT OF THE LORD YOUR GOD, WHICH HE COMMANDED YOU**: For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for himself a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him *to be* commander over his people, BECAUSE YOU HAVE NOT KEPT WHAT THE LORD COMMANDED YOU.»

This probably was Saul's critical test. If he passed it, if he obeyed the Lord and his commandment, his kingdom would be established. If he didn't obey, his kingdom would be lost. As Samuel told him: «for **NOW** the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But **NOW** your kingdom shall not continue». Obviously, Saul didn't pass the test of obedience. When he saw that Samuel was not coming, he abandoned the commandment of the Lord to do his own thing.

Later we see him repeating the same sin. In I Samuel 15:1-3 we read:

I Samuel 15:1-3

«Samuel also said to Saul, «The Lord sent me to anoint you king over his people, over Israel. Now therefore heed the voice of the words of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts: I will punish Amalek *for* what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.»

Saul was commanded by the Lord to utterly destroy Amalek. Verses 7-9 tell us what he finally did:

I Samuel 15:7-9

«And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all *that was* good, **AND WERE UNWILLING TO UTTERLY DESTROY THEM**. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed. »

Despite the fact that Saul had very clear from the Lord that he was to utterly destroy Amalek, he didn't perform His commandment, or more accurately, he performed it only to the extent that he and the people LIKED it. Thus they destroyed what they were WILLING to destroy, keeping safe what THEY WERE UNWILLING TO DESTROY. However, this is not obedience. Obedience is not to do the will of God partially, only to the degree that you like it. Instead, it is to do what God has commanded you **fully and exactly**. As Jeremiah 47:10 tells us:

Jeremiah 48:10

«Cursed is he that does the work of the Lord negligently»
(NKJV-ASV)

Obedience is to do what God has commanded you either through His written Word or, as it was the case with Saul, by revelation. To the degree that we do something that God hadn't said, we are disobedient, even if what we do is done in the name of the Lord. The Lord does not want us busy workers doing our own thing for Him. Instead, He wants us OBEDIENT workers, working EXACTLY what He has commanded us. Saul and his people did the work of the Lord negligently. According to him, they didn't have bad intentions. As he said later: «But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal» (I Samuel 15:21). The people wanted to sacrifice, **YET THEY DIDN'T WANT TO OBEY**. As Samuel said:

I Samuel 15:22-23

«So Samuel said «Has the Lord *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices AS IN OBEYING THE VOICE OF THE LORD? BEHOLD TO OBEY IS BETTER THAN SACRIFICE, AND TO HEED THAN THE FAT OF RAMS. FOR REBELLION IS AS THE SIN OF WITCHCRAFT, AND STUBBORNNESS IS AS INIQUITY AND IDOLATRY. BECAUSE YOU HAVE REJECTED THE WORD OF THE LORD, HE ALSO HAS REJECTED YOU FROM *BEING* A KING.»

It doesn't matter how many sacrifices you do for the Lord. What matters is how OBEDIENT you are to Him. Acceptable sacrifices are only the sacrifices that the Lord has commanded. Genuine service can only be the SERVICE THAT THE LORD HAS ORDAINED. Everything else, even if it is done in His name, is disobedience, action directed by the old nature under the appearance of the new. As Jesus Christ said:

John 7:16-18

«Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but His who sent me. If any one wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God, or *whether* I speak of myself. **HE WHO SPEAKS OF HIMSELF SEEKS HIS OWN GLORY**: BUT HE THAT SEEKS THE GLORY OF THE ONE WHO SENT HIM, THE SAME IS TRUE, AND NO UNRIGHTEOUSNESS IS IN HIM.»

Saul was seeking to please men. He cared more for them and their opinion than for God and His opinion. When later he admitted his sin, what he was afraid of losing was not his relationship with God but his honor by the people: «Then he [Saul] said, «**I have sinned; yet honor me now, please, before the elders of my people and before Israel**, and return with me.» David, Saul's successor, also committed adultery and then murder. However, when Nathan confronted him (II Samuel 12:1-14), what he was concerned for, was not his throne but his relationship with the Lord (Psalms 51). That's why David, seeking restoration of his relationship with the Lord, was forgiven, while Saul seeking restoration on the throne, was rejected.

2. The example of Abraham

In the very opposite of Saul's example stands another example, the example of Abraham. We all probably know the story of Abraham and Isaac. Isaac was the only son Abraham had from Sarah. He was also the son that God had promised him and for whom he waited for many years. However, one day Abraham was commanded by God to sacrifice Isaac:

Genesis 22:1-2

«Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, «Abraham!» And he said, «Here I am.» Then He said, «Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.»

God knew very well how much Abraham loved Isaac. He knew that he was «his only son **that he loved**». After all, it was God that gave Isaac to him. However, did Abraham love Isaac, God's blessing, more than God Himself? Having to choose between the two, what he would really choose? Would he submit himself to God even if this implied a great personal cost or as Saul he would rebel doing his own thing? Turning the question to us: Do we really follow God because we want to know Him and have fellowship with Him, or we follow Him only for His blessings, for the «Isaacs» He gave us, or we expect Him to give us? Really, what would we do, if as in the case of Abraham we were called to put on the altar the greatest blessing that God gave us or we expect Him to give us, whatever this may be? Would we really do it? Though there are uncountable blessings in the Lord, of course these

are not to be the focus of our relationship with Him. Instead, the focus should be to know intimately HIM, AND HIS WONDERFUL SON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. As Paul said:

Philippians 3:8-15

«Yet indeed **I ALSO COUNT ALL THINGS LOSS FOR THE EXCELLENCE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST JESUS MY LORD**: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, **and count them as rubbish that I may gain Christ.....THAT I MAY KNOW HIM, AND THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION, AND THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS**, BEING CONFORMED TO HIS DEATH; IF BY ANY MEANS I MAY ATTAIN TO THE RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD.»

ALL, even the biggest blessing in this world is but rubbish in comparison to the EXCELLENT of the knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord. Returning to Abraham, let's see what he finally did:

Genesis 22:3-10

«So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said to his young men, «Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship and we will come back to you.» So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, «My father!» And he said, «Here I am, my son.» Then he said, «Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?» And Abraham said, «My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.» So the two of them went together. Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.»

Abraham followed exactly what the Lord had told him. It was certainly not the most pleasant thing in his life. He, as well as the other men of the Bible, were not robots that did the will of God mechanically. Instead, they were like us, free will beings that by their own will chose to submit themselves to the Lord. Their obedience was not robotic but «**FROM THE HEART**». This is the only obedience that the Word of God speaks about. God didn't want robots, ice men that would mechanically do what He says, putting no heart in it. Instead He wanted people that WOULD LOVE HIM WITH ALL THEIR HEART, SOUL, MIND AND STRENGTH (Mark 12:30). He wanted free will beings, that would decide «**FROM THE HEART**» to subject themselves to Him. Returning to Abraham, he followed the Word of God despite the fact that it seemed to imply the loss of his own son. Then, when he reached at the critical point, the Lord interfered:

Genesis 22: 11-12, 15-18

«But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, «Abraham, Abraham!» So he said, «Here I am.» And he said, «Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.»..... Then the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: «By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son - blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is on the seashore; and

your seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; **BECAUSE YOU HAVE OBEYED MY VOICE.**»

The purpose of the test was to show whether Abraham would obey God, even if this implied the sacrifice of his blessing. Both Saul and Abraham were blessed by God. The former was made the first king of Israel. The latter had the promise that in his seed all the nations would be blessed. However, there was a great difference between them. Their difference was that the former was after the blessings and their defense. This in turn led him to disobedience and fall. On the other hand, the latter was after the Blesser, taking at the end back his son, together with the confirmation of the blessings for him and his seed.

3. Conclusion

We examined in the above the topic of obedience. Though the examination was by no means exhaustive, I hope it made clear the importance of the matter. As it says in Micah 6:6-8:

Micah 6:6-8

«With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams? Ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn *for* my transgression? The fruit of my body *for* the sin of my soul? HE HAS SHOWN YOU, O MAN, WHAT *IS* GOOD; AND WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF YOU BUT TO DO JUSTLY, TO LOVE MERCY, AND TO WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD?»

All that God wants from us is to do justly, to love mercy and **to walk humbly with Him**. To humble ourselves under His mighty hand so that He may exalt us in due time (I Peter 5:6). Disobedience, either in the form of doing what the Lord has not said or not doing what the Lord has said, is action separately from God. It doesn't matter what we do, or the intentions we may have. What matters is whether what is done comes out of obedience to Him, as the sacrifice of Abraham, or of disobedience, as the sacrifice that Saul said he intended to do.

Tassos Kioulachoglou

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Daniel 3:16-18)

In Daniel 3 we read about three men Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, together with Daniel, had been appointed to authority positions in the province of Babylon (Daniel 2:49). They were godly Jews to whom God had given «knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom» (Daniel 1:17), and whom He had furthered to these authority positions. Because of their position, they would probably enjoy many things that not only the Jews but also most of the natives didn't enjoy. They were certainly blessed people. However, one day the situation changed. Nebuchadnezzar, their boss, had made a gold image asking everyone to worship it. All in the kingdom had to worship this image and if someone

disobeyed, he would be burned in the den of fire. Thus, Shadrach, Meshah and Abednego faced a challenge: Would they follow the king's command, defending their lives, their blessings, their families, their positions, and then probably asking «sorry» from God, or would they obey to His Word, never bowing to this idol? Daniel 3:8-12 tells us that they finally chose the latter. Thus, they were brought before the king, and though he was very angry with them, he decided to give them one more opportunity: «But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?» (Daniel 3:15), he told them. Then, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied:

Daniel 3:16-18

«Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego answered and said to the king, «O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If it be *so*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up»

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had determined that they would by no means worship this idol. Though they knew that God could deliver them, they didn't consider it as given. They obeyed God unconditionally, and even if He didn't deliver them («But if NOT») they would still not worship the king's idols («let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up»). As Daniel 3:28 says: **They had delivered their bodies to worship Him**. Their reply made the king even angrier and the den even hotter. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were immediately cast there. Yet, something unexpected made the king and his counselors astonished: instead of being burned instantaneously, these people were walking in the den, not alone but together with someone whose form was «like a son of God» (Daniel 3:25)! Immediately, the king commanded to take them out. His response is recorded in verses 28-30:

Daniel 3:28-30

«Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, «Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who sent His angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God! Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other God who can deliver like this. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon»

Sometimes, what we focus in passages like these is the blessings and the deliverance of God. And yes they should have our attention. Yet what I would like to also point out today, is the obedience of those three men, and especially the fact that it was **unconditional**. Really, these people wouldn't obey God only if He delivered them but also if He didn't deliver them. Turning this to us, we should obey God unconditionally, because we have decided to fully submit ourselves to Him. It is unconditional submission that is the source of our obedience. Of course God can deliver, yet our obedience is not to be based on this or on any other condition.

All things work together for good to those that love God (Part II) - The case of Joseph

Two issues ago we considered the well known passage of Romans 8:28. There we read:

Romans 8:28

«And we know that all things work together for good to those that love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose»

Today, I would like to return to this passage and consider its application with an example from the Old Testament: the example of Joseph.

1. From the land of Canaan to Egypt

To begin, we will go to Genesis 37. There, starting from verse 3, we read:

Genesis 37:3-11

«Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he *was* the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of *many* colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him. Now Joseph had a dream, and he told *it* to his brothers; and they hated him even more. So he said to them, «Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf.» And his brothers said to him, «Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?» So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, «Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon and the eleven stars bowed down to me.» So he told *it* to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, «What *is* this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?» And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter *in mind*»

Later, in Genesis 42, we read the fulfillment of Joseph's dreams concerning his brothers:

Genesis 42:6, 9

«And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down before him with *their* faces to the earth.....Then Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed about them...»

As it may be evident, the dreams of Joseph were prophetic. In other words, there were dreams given by God, through which He showed to him what would happen in the future, in fact many years later²³. Though at first nothing may seem strange in the above, it becomes when we remember the negative reaction these dreams had on Joseph's brothers. Really, they didn't cause but only their envy and hate, that was added to their hate for him because of the special love of their father. In fact, they hated Joseph so much that after thinking even to kill him (Genesis 37:18), they finally sold him to some passing traders on their way to Egypt:

Genesis 37:25-28

«And they sat down to eat a meal. Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry *them* down to Egypt. So Judah said to his brothers, «What profit *is there* if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he *is* our brother *and* our flesh.» And his brothers listened. Then Midianite traders passed by; so *the brothers* pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty *shekels* of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt»

The hate of Joseph's brothers finally made them to sell him as a slave to Egypt, far from his father and family. Yet, not far from the Lord:

Genesis 39:1-6

«Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there. The Lord was with Joseph and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the Lord *was* with him and that the Lord made all he did to prosper in his hand. So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all *that* he had he put under his authority. So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had in the house and in the field. Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate»

The Lord was with Joseph, blessing and establishing everything that he did in the house of Potiphar. Seeing this, his master made him an overseer of his house, passing to his oversight all that he had. However, the things once more changed dramatically:

Genesis 39:6-15, 19-20

«Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, «Lie with me.» But he refused and said to his master's wife, «Look, my master does not know what *is* with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. *There is* no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you *are* his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?» So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her *or* to be with her. But it happened about this

²³ In Genesis 37:2 Joseph was 17 years old, while in Genesis 42:6, when the dreams were fulfilled, he was probably 39 (he was 30 «when he stood before Pharaoh» (Genesis 41:46) and the year that his brothers went for second time to Egypt was the second year of famine (Genesis 45:6)) .

time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house *was* inside, that she caught him by his garment, saying, «Lie with me.» But he left his garment in her hand and fled and ran outside. And so it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled outside, that she called to the men of her house and spoke to them, saying, «See, he has brought in to us a Hebrew to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. And it happened, when he heard that I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me, and fled and went outside».....So it was, when his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, saying, «Your servant did to me after this manner,» that his anger was aroused. Then Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison where the king's prisoners *were* confined.»

Just when stability started to be re-established for Joseph, another conspiracy happened against him that put him into prison. However, the Lord was with him even there and showed him mercy.

Genesis 39:20-23

«and he was there in the prison. But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who *were* in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing. The keeper of the prison did not look into anything *that was* under *Joseph's* authority, because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper.»

The Lord was with Joseph in the prison, exactly as He was with him in Potiphar's house and in the land of Canaan. He was with him showing him mercy and favor. However, let's for a moment put ourselves in Joseph's position. He was expelled from his father's house because of the hate of his brothers for the dreams that God had given him. They sold him as a slave to Egypt, but his master, deceived by his wife, put him into prison. He was alone, slave in the prison of a country that he had never chosen to be. Certainly, things like these are not what someone would immediately call «blessings». However, the Lord was with Him. He was with Him and showed him mercy. And really this is the important. As Joseph, it may be that we do not understand why we are where we are, why it happened what happened, but **THIS IS NOT THE IMPORTANT. What is the important IS THE LORD TO BE WITH US.** As He said, «**ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD**» to those that love Him. If we love Him, **ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD**, even the things that do not seem as «good», and even the things that we may not fully understand.

Returning to Joseph, verses 1-8 of chapter 40 tells us:

Genesis 40:1-8

«It came to pass after these things *that* the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt. And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief butler and the chief baker. So he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison, the place where Joseph *was* confined. And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them and he served them; so they were in custody for a while. Then the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, who *were* confined in the prison, had a dream, both of them, each man's dream in one night *and* each man's dream with its interpretation. And Joseph came in to them in the morning and looked at them, and saw that they *were* sad. So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in the custody of his lord's house, saying, «Why do you look so sad today?» And they said to him, «We each have had a dream, and *there is* no interpreter of it.» So Joseph said to them, «Do not interpretation belong to God? Tell *them* to me, please.»

«Do not interpretation belong to God?», Joseph said, and really to Him belongs ALL INTERPRETATION. Thus, the two Egyptians went on and said their dreams to Joseph, who then gave them their interpretation. This means that these dreams had interpretation, i.e. they were dreams coming from the Lord (He was the one that gave the interpretation). According to this interpretation, the one of the two officers would be executed while the other would be restored to his office. From the latter, Joseph asked to remember him and make mention of him to Pharaoh:

Genesis 40:14-15

«But remember me when it is well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house. For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; and also I have done nothing here that they should put me into the dungeon»

Nevertheless, as soon as the chief butler was restored to his office, he forgot Joseph's pleas:

Genesis 40:23

«Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him»

Summarizing the above, Joseph's story is the story of a man that had done no evil and yet he was persecuted. It is the story of a man who for a long time was living a life of many «why», very few answers, yet with the continuous PRESENCE OF THE LORD. His brothers sold him as a slave to Egypt, because they hated him for the dreams that God gave him. His boss in Egypt put him into prison, being deceived by his wife, though the only that Joseph did was to protect him. The chief butler as soon as he was restored to his position forgot him. It is really difficult to understand the good of all these things and the reason they happened to this godly man. Nevertheless, despite the lack of understanding, Joseph had FAITH in God. He didn't sin in Potiphara's house because he feared God. He boldly made reference to the Lord to the two Egyptians and by His Spirit gave the interpretation of their dreams. His lack of understanding didn't obstruct him from trusting God. You also may not understand the reason that some things happened to you, but you also should not permit the lack of understanding to be a barrier to your faith: ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THOSE THAT LOVE GOD, and be sure, this is as much true for you as we will see it was for Joseph.

2. From the prison to the palace.

Moving on, chapter 41 tells us for another dream, seen this time by Pharaoh:

Genesis 41:1-14

«Then it came to pass, at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh had a dream; and behold, he stood by the river. Suddenly there came up out of the river seven cows, fine looking and fat; and they fed in the meadow. Then behold, seven other cows came up after them out of the river, ugly and gaunt, and stood by the *other* cows by the bank of the river. And the ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven fine looking and fat cows. So Pharaoh awoke. He slept and dreamed a second time; and suddenly seven heads of grain came up on one stalk, plump and good. Then behold, seven thin heads, blighted by the east wind, sprang up after them. And the seven thin heads devoured the seven plump and full heads. So Pharaoh awoke, and

indeed *it was* a dream. Now it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled, and he sent and call for all the magicians of the Egypt and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but *there was* no one who could interpret them for Pharaoh. Then the chief battler spoke to Pharaoh, saying «I remember my faults this day. When Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, *both* me and the chief baker, we each had a dream in one night, he and I. Each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his *own* dream. Now there *was* a young Hebrew man with us there, a servant of the captain of the guard. And we told him, and he interpreted our dreams for us; to each man he interpreted according to his *own* dream. And it came to pass, just as he interpreted for us, so it happened. He restored me to my office, and he hanged him.» Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him quickly out of the dungeon; and he shaved, changed his clothing, and came to Pharaoh.»

Two years had to pass till the chief butler remember Joseph. Now one could ask: «Why should this time have gone and really why this didn't happen from the beginning?» However, the answer is simple: BECAUSE THIS WAS THE WILL OF GOD. We live in an age that wants everything to be done FAST. On the other hand, God wants everything to be done BEST and fast is not necessarily the best. Therefore, two more years had to pass with Joseph in prison till Pharaoh received those dreams from the Lord. As Joseph said later, giving the interpretation, «GOD has shown to Pharaoh what He is about to do» (Genesis 41:25). It was the Lord that chose that time to give these dreams to Pharaoh. Now, going one step back, it was the Lord that two years ago had given those two dreams to Pharaoh's officials and it was He that gave to them their interpretation through Joseph. It was the Lord that brought Joseph to Potiphar's house and it was He that permitted the things that happened there and which finally brought him to that specific prison²⁴. It was the Lord that gave those two dreams to Joseph that made his brothers to hate him so much that they sold him to Egypt. We have probably started to understand little by little the plan of God and we will understand it even more as we read further.

So Joseph through the spirit of the Lord, explained the dreams to Pharaoh. Egypt would have great crops for seven years. However, this period would be followed by seven years of famine. Joseph also told Pharaoh how he was to handle the situation. At the end:

Genesis 41:37-45

«So the advise was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants. «Can we find *such a one* as this, a man in whom *is* the Spirit of God?» Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, «Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, *there is* no one discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you.» And Pharaoh said to Joseph, «See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.» Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph's hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, «Bow the knee!» So he set him over all the land of Egypt. Pharaoh also said to Joseph, «I *am* Pharaoh and without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.» And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-Paaneah. And he gave him as a wife Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On. So Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt»

²⁴ This prison was the prison that the «king's prisoners were confined» (Genesis 39:20). That's why the king's butler and baker were brought there.

Within a few minutes, Joseph was transformed from a slave of the prison into a prime minister. He was made second in command over all the land of Egypt! This didn't happen gradually but very rapidly. If you are now in a situation that you feel as unpleasant, in a situation that you would like to get rid of, the Lord can take you out of it. He can do it swiftly, turning the things upside down within only a few moments. As He will do with our rapture for example. It will happen says the Word, «in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye» (I Corinthians 15:52). You close your eyes and you are on the earth, doing something ordinary that you probably do for years. After a moment, you open your eyes and you are in the air, together with the Lord Jesus Christ and all the saints! It will only take a moment! GOD HAS THE POWER TO DO IT AND HE WILL DO IT. Yet, He also has the TIME to do it. This time had arrived for Joseph. He passed many things but the Lord was always with him. The things he passed didn't happen accidentally. Instead, they were part of the plan of the Lord that finally brought him before Pharaoh. Removing the end (and we haven't seen it all), it would be difficult for someone to understand how the events of Joseph's life worked for good. The same was probably true for Joseph as well. Without seeing the end, he was unable to understand, yet he was not unable TO BELIEVE. You may be weak in understanding, yet DO NOT BE WEAK IN BELIEVING in believing what the Word says for everything that you may live today: i.e. THAT IF YOU LOVE GOD, ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD, either you understand it or not.

Returning to Joseph, his rise to the second in command in Egypt, was not the end of the plan of God. When the seven years of famine came, this also affected the land that his family dwelled:

Genesis 41:56-57, 42:1-3, 6-9

«And the famine became severe in the land of Egypt. So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine was severe in all lands. When Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons, «Why do you look at one another?» And he said, «Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us there, that we may live and not die. So Joseph's ten brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt.....And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down before him with *their* faces to the earth. Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he acted as a stranger to them and spoke roughly to them. Then he said to them, «Where do you come from?» And they said from the land of Canaan to buy food.» So Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. Then Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed about them, and said to them, «You *are* spies! You have come to see the nakedness of the land!»»

Many years ago, the Lord had given two dreams to Joseph, where his brothers were bowing before him. In fact, it was these dreams that made his brothers to hate him so much that they sold him to Egypt. Since then, it was only now, at the fulfillment of those dreams, that they met each other. However, Joseph didn't make himself known to his brothers immediately. Instead, he pretended that he didn't know them, accusing them that they were spies. Then, after he kept them for three days, he called them again asking them to go and bring Benjamin while he would keep one of them in Egypt till their return. This sorrowed his brothers and they considered what they had done to him many years ago as the cause of what was happening now. Thus, without knowing that the ruler before them was Joseph, confessed their guilty for what they had done to him:

Genesis 42:21-24

«Then they said to one another, «We *are* truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress

came upon us.» And Rueben answered them, saying, «Did I not speak to you, saying, «Do not sin against the boy;» and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us.» But they did not know that Joseph understood *them*, for he spoke to them through an interpreter. And he turned himself away from them and wept.»

The last time that Joseph saw his brothers was when they sold him to Egypt, many years ago. The next time he met them again was the time of the fulfillment of the dreams for which they sold him and the confession of their guilty for what they had done to him. Now Joseph knew that his brothers had repented: they confessed it before him! Really, how the Lord arranges it and hurts and misunderstandings of many years are healed within only some moments.

Returning to Joseph, he kept Symeon, while his brothers returned to Canaan to bring Benjamin. After they brought him, Joseph permitted them to go, only to bring them back quickly, accusing them that they had stolen his silver cup that he had intentionally hidden in Benjamin's sack (Genesis 44:2). Because of this, he requested that Benjamin would stay as a slave in Egypt. Hearing this, his brothers «fell before him on the ground», pleading him for Benjamin. (Genesis 44:14-34). Then:

Genesis 45:1-8

«Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, «Make everyone go out from me!» So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it. Then Joseph said to his brothers, «I *am* Joseph; does my father still live?» But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. And Joseph said to his brothers, «Please come near to me.» So they came near. Then he said: «I *am* Joseph your brother whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; **FOR** GOD SENT ME BEFORE YOU TO PRESERVE LIFE. **FOR** these two years the famine *has been* in the land, and *there are* still five years in which *there will be* neither plowing nor harvesting. AND GOD SENT ME BEFORE YOU **TO** PRESERVE A POSTERITY FOR YOU IN THE EARTH, **AND TO** SAVE YOUR LIVES BY A GREAT DELIVERANCE. SO NOW *IT WAS* NOT YOU *WHO* SENT ME HERE, BUT GOD;» AND HE HAS MADE ME A FATHER TO PHARAOH, AND LORD OF ALL HIS HOUSE, AND A RULER THROUGHOUT ALL THE LAND OF EGYPT»

and Genesis 50:20

«YOU MEANT EVIL AGAINST ME; *BUT* GOD MEANT IT **FOR GOOD, IN ORDER TO** BRING IT ABOUT AS *IT IS* THIS DAY, **TO** SAVE MANY PEOPLE ALIVE»

In the above, I have emphasized the words «for», «in order to» and «to». These words are words that introduce ANSWERS. They are words that answer to questions that start with «why». It was therefore time for answers. It was time for the plan of God, concerning Joseph and his mission to Egypt, to be opened widely. It was the same plan that started many years ago in Canaan, with Joseph's two dreams that caused him to be hated by his brothers that then sold him to Egypt. However, his brothers and their acts were but tools that God utilized to bring His will to pass. IT WAS GOD THAT SENT JOSEPH TO EGYPT AND NOT HIS BROTHERS. IT WAS GOD THAT PLACED HIM IN POTIPHAR'S HOUSE AND GAVE HIM GRACE BEFORE HIM, AND IT WAS HE THAT TOOK HIM FROM THERE TO PRISON. IT WAS GOD THAT GAVE THE TWO DREAMS TO PHARAOH'S OFFICIALS AS WELL AS THEIR INTERPRETATION THROUGH JOSEPH. IT WAS GOD THAT AFTER TWO YEARS GAVE THOSE DREAMS TO PHARAOH AND WHO

THROUGH THE CHIEF BUTLER BROUGHT JOSEPH TO THE PALACE. IT WAS GOD THAT GAVE THE INTERPRETATION TO JOSEPH AND IT WAS HE THAT MADE HIM SECOND IN COMMAND IN EGYPT. IT WAS HE THAT BROUGHT JOSEPH'S BROTHERS TO BOW BEFORE HIM IN EGYPT AND CONFESS THEIR GUILTY BEFORE HIM. IT WAS HE THAT PRESERVED ALL ISRAEL IN LIFE. Really, Israel didn't leave from Egypt but only after centuries, with thousands of thousands and with the way that the Word of God says. God had his own plans for Israel and ALL THAT HAPPENED TO JOSEPH WORKED TOGETHER FOR GOOD though it may not have appeared as such from the beginning and though it may not be understood but only after years.

Tassos Kioulachoglou

Articles

- «The fear of the Lord *is* the beginning of knowledge»
- «If you are willing» or «if you can»?
- «But made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant» (Philippians 2:7)
- «A conscience without offence»

«The fear of the Lord *is* the beginning of knowledge»

As title of the present article I borrowed this phrase of God's Word from Proverbs 1:7, that will also be our starting point today.

«The fear of the Lord *is* the beginning of knowledge»

In other words, in order for someone to know the Lord, he should FEAR HIM. Or to say it differently, IF SOMEONE DOES NOT FEAR THE LORD, HE HASN'T EVEN STARTED TO KNOW HIM. He may know the Scriptures very well, he may have accurate

and detailed knowledge of its doctrines, yet if he doesn't fear the Lord, though he may know the Scriptures, he doesn't know the Lord that wrote the Scriptures. Knowledge of the Scriptures without fear of God is not knowledge of God. This becomes knowledge of God only when it passes from the mind to the heart. As Proverbs 2:1-5 tells us:

Proverbs 2:1-5

«My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply YOUR HEART to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, *and* lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as *for* hidden treasures; **THEN YOU WILL UNDERSTAND THE FEAR OF THE LORD, AND FIND THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.**»

It is **the heart** that needs to apply understanding. It is **the heart** that needs to bow to the Lord and it is **the hearts** that should open, admitting Christ to reign in them. Only if the Word of God enters our heart, only if the spirit joins the letter, we «will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God».

1. The fear of the Lord: not just a simple respect

The fear of the Lord is many times understood as a respect. However, it is not just a simple respect. The respect there may be between equals is not the same with the respect towards a higher one. A subject of a kingdom, does not respect his king, as he may respect his colleagues. Even if he has full boldness before the throne, as we, through the blood of Christ, have before the throne of God, he continues to be **a subject** before the King, and the one that sits on the throne continues to be **the King**. Fear of the Lord means that our hearts fully sense who we are, who is He that sits on the throne and how much higher is He from us. As Jeremiah 10:6-7 says:

Jeremiah 10:6-7

«Inasmuch as *there is* none like You, O Lord. You *are* great, and Your name *is* great in might. **Who would not fear You, O King of the nations?**»

and Revelation 15:4

«**Who shall not fear You, O Lord and glorify Your name?**»

Also Malachi 1:6

«A son honors *his* father, and a servant *his* master. If then I am the Father where *is* my honor? **And if I am a Master, where is my fear?** Says the Lord of hosts»
(NKJV-KJV)

and Jeremiah 5:22-24

«**Do you not fear Me? Says the Lord. Will you not tremble at My presence,** who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass beyond it? And though its waves toss to and fro, yet they cannot prevail; Though they roar, yet they cannot pass over it. But this people has a defiant and rebellious heart; They have revolted and departed. They do not say in their heart, **Let us now fear the Lord our God,** who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season. He reserves for us the appointed weeks of the harvest.»

Psalms 33:6-9

«By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deep in storehouses. **Let all the earth fear the Lord; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.**»

Really who will not fear the Lord? Who will not bow before Him. HE MADE US AND THE WHOLE UNIVERSE. EVERYTHING, SEEN OR UNSEEN, WAS MADE BY HIS OWN HAND. Knowledge of the Scriptures without fear of God will definitely lead to pride (I Corinthians 8:1) and the one that just knows that he has full boldness before the throne, without fearing the One that sits on the throne, he will go to Him, like the Pharisee of Luke 18:

Luke 18:9-14

«Also he spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: «Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself. «God, I thank you that I am not like other men - extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.» And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, «God, be merciful to me a sinner!» I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; **for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.**»»

It is the spirit that gives life. It is the pure in the heart that will see God (Matthew 5:8) and it is those that fear the Lord the ones to whom He is pleased (Psalms 147:11).

2. Boldness and the fear of the Lord in the New Testament

A view that many, implicitly or explicitly, hold about the fear of God is that it has been somehow ceased by the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. They probably confuse the boldness that Christ gave us before the throne with the fear towards the One that is on the throne. However it is one thing to have, as we have, boldness before the King and entirely another to not fear the King. As Isaiah 33:6 tells us:

Isaiah 33:6

«The fear of the Lord *is* His treasure»

The fear of the Lord is a TREASURE whose absence makes any boldness before the throne, arrogance. Turning to the work of Jesus Christ, the boldness he obtained, not only did not abolish the fear of God but also I believe it cannot work without it. Without it, it becomes arrogance, Pharisaism. That's why the fear of the Lord has its own position both in the New and the Old Testament. Really, starting from Acts 9:31 we read:

Acts 9:31

«Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD and in the comfort of the holy spirit, they were multiplied.»

I Peter 2:17

«Honor all. Love the brotherhood. FEAR GOD. Honor the king.»

II Corinthians 7:1

«Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness IN THE FEAR OF GOD.»

Colossians 3:22

«Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, FEARING GOD.»

Cornelius, the first Gentile at whose home the gospel was preached, was a man that feared God. As Acts 10:1-2 tells us:

Acts 10:1-2

«There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout *man* and one WHO FEARED GOD with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.»

and as Peter said in Acts 10:34-35

Acts 10:34-35

«Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: «In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. BUT IN EVERY NATION WHOEVER FEARS HIM AND WORKS RIGHTEOUSNESS IS ACCEPTED BY HIM»»

The fear of the Lord is not the reverse of boldness before the throne. What is the reverse is cowardice and it is this that the Lord removed. We are no longer coming before God's throne being afraid, cowardly, but with boldness and fear of God.

3. The fear of the Lord: A fountain of blessings and life

The fear of the Lord is a topic of special emphasis in God's Word as the many times is referred there show. Also it is a topic that is connected with many blessings and promises, as it can be seen from the passages that we give below, and which we would suggest that the reader studies carefully one by one.

So starting from Psalms we read:

Psalms 34:9

«Oh fear the Lord, you His saints! *There is* no want to those who fear Him»

Psalms 34:7

«Angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them»

Psalms 112:1-2

«Praise the Lord! Blessed *is* the man who fears the Lord, *who* delights greatly in His commandments. His descendants will be mighty on earth;»

Psalms 25:12

«Who *is* the man that fears the Lord? Him shall He teach in the way that he should choose. (NKJV-RSV)

Psalms 25:14

«The secret of the Lord *is* with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant»

Psalms 31:19

«Oh, how great *is* your goodness, which you have laid up for those who fear you, *which* you have prepared for those who trust in you in the presence of the sons of men!»

Psalms 33:18

«Behold the eye of the Lord *is* on those who fear Him, On those who hope in His mercy»

Psalms 85:9

«Surely His salvation *is* near to those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land»

Psalms 103:11

«For as the heavens are high above the earth, *So* great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;»

Psalms 103:13

«As a father pities *his* children, *so* the Lord pities those who fear Him»

Psalms 103:17

«But the mercy of the Lord *is* from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children.»

Psalms 111:4-5

«He has made His wonderful works to be remembered; The Lord *is* gracious and full of compassion. He has given food to those who fear Him; He will ever be mindful of His covenant.»

Psalms 115:13

«He will bless those who fear the Lord, *both* small and great»

Psalms 128:1-4

«Blessed *is* every one who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways. When you eat the labor of your hands, you *shall be* happy, and *it shall be* well with you. Your wife *shall be* like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house; Your children like olive plants all around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord.»

Psalms 145:19

«He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them.»

Proverbs 10:27

«The fear of the Lord prolongs days»

Proverbs 14:26

«In the fear of the Lord *there is* strong confidence, and His children will have a place of refuge»

Proverbs 14:27

«The fear of the Lord *is* a fountain of life, to turn *one* away from the snares of death.»

Proverbs 15:33

«The fear of the Lord *is* the instruction of wisdom, and before honor *is* humility.»

Proverbs 16:6

«In mercy and truth atonement is provided for iniquity; and by the fear of the Lord *one* departs from evil.»

Proverbs 19:23

«The fear of the Lord *leads* to life, and *he who has it* will abide in satisfaction; He will not be visited with evil.»

Proverbs 22:4

«By humility *and* the fear of the Lord *are* riches and honor and life.»

Proverbs 23:17

«Be in the fear of the Lord all the day»

Ecclesiastes 8:12-13

«Though a sinner does evil a hundred *times*, and his *days* are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong *his* days, *which are* as a shadow, because he does not fear before God.»

Really I don't know of any other topic that is connected with so many promises in God's Word as the fear of God. Of course we should not fear Him only for the promises. Our relationship with Him is not a trading transaction, but a fellowship of love whose aim is to know Him through the door that is called Jesus Christ. It is he that prepared everything that was required for our entrance to the throne.

4. Conclusion

Concluding this article I have to confess that I feel it is too little for such a broad and great topic. Though it is not possible an issue like this to cover such a topic extensively, I hope it helped us to understand its rarely mentioned importance. We do not want to be people that know about God but only theoretically. We do not want to be accurate in everything in the letters, yet not knowing the Lord that wrote the letters. Our sole aim should be to know the Lord, and as we read, the fear of the Lord is the beginning, the prerequisite for such knowledge. Concluding:

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

«Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all.»

Tassos Kioulachoglou

«If you are willing» or «if you can»?

In Mark 1:40 we read:

Mark 1:40

«Now a leper came to him [Jesus], imploring him, kneeling down to him and saying to him, **«IF YOU ARE WILLING, YOU CAN MAKE ME CLEAN.»**»

Going now to chapter 9 of the same gospel, we read:

Mark 9:21-23

«So he [Jesus] asked his father, «How long has this been happening to him?» And he said, «From childhood. And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But **IF YOU CAN DO ANYTHING**, have compassion on us and help us.» Jesus said to him, «**IF YOU CAN BELIEVE ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE TO HIM WHO BELIEVES**»

In both cases, a suffering man came to Jesus for help, starting his petition with an «if». Yet, each man's «if» was different, as different was also the reaction of the Lord. Thus, the leper said: «**IF YOU ARE WILLING, YOU CAN**». If Jesus was willing, if it was God's will for this man to be healed, if the Lord desired it, this man had no doubt that He could do it. He was sure that what he asked for was not a matter of the Lord's ability but a matter of the Lord's willingness. It is never a question of whether the Lord is able but is always a question of whether He is willing. It is not faith to believe the Lord will do whatever you may want, regardless of whether He wants it too. What is faith is to believe that «if the Lord is willing, He can». Faith puts the weight on the will of the Lord and never on His ability. This is considered as given. «**IF YOU ARE WILLING, YOU CAN**». Yes, the «if» is absolutely right. **IF THE LORD IS WILLING, HE CAN**. You may not have an answer over a matter. You may not have everything clear. Yet do this: go to the Lord as the leper went, having faith that if it is His will, He can. Ask Him for His will to be done and accept the outcome as coming from His own hand. This is what Christ also did in the night of Gethsemane:

Luke 22:41-42

«And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and he knelt down and prayed, saying, «Father, IF IT IS YOUR WILL, take this cup away from me; nevertheless NOT MY WILL, BUT YOURS, BE DONE.»»

Jesus knew that his crucifixion was not in the hand of Satan or the Jews. If it was God's will, he could avoid it. When he was drinking the cup, he knew that he was getting it from the Father's hand («the cup that THE FATHER gave me, will I not drink it? (John 18:11)). He had prayed about it. When you pray to the Lord and believe that if He is willing He can, and what you pray does not happen, it is not because God didn't hear you but because that was His will. For everything that you ask in your prayer having the faith that says, «if you are willing you can» be sure that, if it is indeed God's will, you will receive it. The leper went to the Lord like this, having faith that if the Lord was willing then He could heal him, which is what finally happened.

However, this didn't happen in the second case. Really, going there, we see that the respective man in need also started his petition with an «if». However, what followed his «if» was entirely different from what followed the «if» of the leper. Thus his «if» was not «if you are willing you can», but «IF YOU CAN DO ANYTHING.....». Contrary to the leper, this man did not put the question on the willingness of the Lord but on HIS ABILITY. That's why what followed His phrase, was not the action of the Lord but His rebuke:

Mark 9:23

«Jesus said to him, «**IF YOU CAN BELIEVE** ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE TO HIM WHO BELIEVES»»

The Lord replied to «if you can» of this man with another «IF YOU CAN». «IF YOU CAN BELIEVE». Believe what? What the leper also believed i.e. «IF YOU ARE WILLING, YOU CAN». The distance between belief and unbelief is as much as is the distance between «if you are willing, you can» and «if you can do anything...». In the first case, if it is His will, the Lord takes action. However, in the second case He answers: «If you can believe, all things are possible». Nonetheless, He does not stop there, but, if something is His will, He moves to help those that honestly seek Him, as he also moved for this man:

Mark 9:24-27

«Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, «**Lord I believe; help my unbelief!**» When Jesus saw that people came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, «Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!» Then *the spirit* cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, «He is dead.» But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.»

The Lord helps, heals, strengthens. He does not overlook the unbelief. In contrast, he rebukes it, helping however everyone that honestly seeks Him. Thus he healed the kid, as he had earlier caught Peter when he was sinking in the middle of the sea (Matthew 14:28-31), and as he also helped the terrified disciples the night of the great storm of wind (Mark 4:37-41). Can you really imagine him, leaving Peter to sink because he was lacking faith? But he didn't leave him. When he cried to him, he immediately stretched forth his hand and caught him, and then he rebuked him for his little faith. The Lord will never send away anyone that honestly seeks Him for help. When someone honestly calls Him, the Lord stretches forth His hand for help. Really what a wonderful Lord! It is not a matter of His ability but of His will. It is this will that should take the emphasis in our prayers. «IF YOU ARE WILLING, YOU

CAN». If not «your will be done» (Matthew 26:42). The phrase «if you can do anything» is a phrase of unbelief that the Lord rebukes. However, even if someone feels having little faith, even if he is nearly wrecked as Peter, yet turns truly to Him, the Lord will not leave him. What is needed is to call for His help and the Lord will caught him. He will not permit the loss of any soul that honestly seeks Him for help.

Tassos Kioulachoglou

**«But made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant»
(Philippians 2:7)**

In Mark 15:29-31 we read:

Mark 15:29-31

«And those who passed by blasphemed him, wagging their heads and saying, «Aha! *You* who destroy the temple and build *it* in three days, save **YOURSELF**, and come down from the cross!» Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, «He saved others; **HIMSELF** he cannot save»»

«Save YOURSELF». Really how strange was to these men that, he, that had saved many, was now on the cross, not caring for his own self. The one that serves himself, thinks it as very strange when he sees someone that denies to do the same. He that could have twelve legions²⁵ of angels, denied HIMSELF, and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross, calling us also to have the same mind with him:

Philippians 2:5-8

«LET THIS MIND BE IN YOU WHICH WAS ALSO IN CHRIST JESUS, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and **BECAME OBEDIENT TO THE POINT OF DEATH, EVEN THE DEATH OF THE CROSS.**»

Luke 9:23-24

«Then he said to *them* all, «If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.»»

Jesus Christ denied himself. He lost his life, yet not for ever. After three days and three nights, God **raised him from the dead**. As Philippians says:

Philippians 2:9-11

«**Therefore** God also has highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth; and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.»

²⁵ One legion = 6826 men.

The road that Jesus Christ pointed is a narrow road (Matthew 7:14). It is a road that someone walks not by keeping his life but by losing it. However, it is also the road of the resurrection. It may be that the crucifixion of the old man, the self, brings pain, but crucifixion is always followed by resurrection. We do not want to avoid the pain of the crucifixion, for without crucifixion there is no resurrection. We do not want to have the old man living in our hearts, but the new one, THE RESURRECTED CHRIST. HE is our ALIVE example and the one to whom we should look at:

Hebrews 12:1-2

«let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**»

Tassos Kioulachoglou

«A conscience without offence»

In Acts 24:16, Paul, speaking to Felix, a Roman governor, said:

Acts 24:16

«I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.»

Among the things that Paul was striving, was to have his conscience clean, without offense, toward God and men. In contrast to him, some others followed/follow another way regarding conscience. In I Timothy 4:1-2 we read:

I Timothy 4:1-2

«Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, **having their own conscience seared with a hot iron**»

In the very opposite of the clean conscience we have the seared conscience. This is the amputated conscience that is unable to feel, for it is seared. It is the apathetic conscience that has been numbed and which is now indifferent and lax, as the heart of the respective man. However, this was not the conscience of Paul, nor can it be the conscience of a man that walks in fellowship with the living God. When there is fellowship with Him nothing can remain dead: it is resurrected. The fellowship with the living God gives life to conscience / heart and only with an alive conscience can one walk with Him. Returning to Paul, he didn't sear his conscience to face pain and opposition, but in contrast he strove to have his conscience always clean, without any offence or laxity that would make him apathetic. What Paul preached, he was also. He was striving to have a conscience without offence, a clean heart, toward God and men. May we also have the same mind, striving as well to have the same alive conscience, the same clean heart, without offence towards God and men.

Tassos Kioulachoglou

Articles

- **The mercy of the Lord**
- «He is not far»
- «The living water»
- «The iniquity of Sodom»
- **The will of God**
- **The 23rd Psalm – A new Approach**

The mercy of the Lord

The mercy of the Lord is a much spoken subject in the Word of God. Really, the word «mercy» appears there over 250 times and today we will have a look at some of these occurrences.

1. Mercy: what is it?

To understand what mercy is, we will start from Luke 10:30-37. There, Jesus is using a parable to answer the question of a lawyer about who is his neighbor:

Luke 10:30-37

«Then Jesus answered and said: A certain *man* went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded *him*, and departed, leaving *him* half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, **he had compassion**. So he went to *him* and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave *them* to the innkeeper, and said to him, «Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.» So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?» and he said, «He who showed **MERCY** on him.»

In contrast to the priest and the Levite, the Samaritan denied to be indifferent to the half-dead traveler. Instead, he had compassion on him; he showed him mercy and helped him. Mercy therefore is to have compassion on someone; to help out of love without expecting something in return. And the Lord is very rich in it. As Ephesians 2 characteristically tells us:

Ephesians 2:4-6

«BUT GOD WHO IS RICH IN MERCY, BECAUSE OF HIS GREAT LOVE WITH WHICH HE LOVED US, EVEN WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN TRESPASSES, MADE US ALIVE TOGETHER WITH CHRIST (by grace you have been saved), and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.»

It was not our worth or what we could do that gave us salvation but the grace, love and mercy of God. As the one the thieves had left half-dead, so we were dead in trespasses. Religion, philosophy and all else could not help us. They passed us by as the Levite and the priest. However, the Lord «WHO IS RICH IN MERCY, BECAUSE OF HIS GREAT LOVE WITH WHICH HE LOVED US, EVEN WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN TRESPASSES, MADE US ALIVE TOGETHER WITH CHRIST» He stretched His hand and «delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love» (Colossians 1:12-13).

As I Peter 1:3 tells us:

I Peter 1:3

«Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who ACCORDING TO HIS ABUNDANT MERCY has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead»

and Romans 5:8

«But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us»

We were dead. He was full of love, mercy and compassion. He stretched out his hand and made us alive. Though unworthy, He made us worthy. Though sinners, He made us righteous. Though His enemies, He reconciled us with Himself. Though in the kingdom of darkness, He transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love. Really, how great His grace, love and mercy for each of us personally.

2. «Vessels of mercy»

Continuing on the same topic, we will go to Romans 9. There in verses 15-16 we read:

Romans 9: 15-16

«For He says to Moses, I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.» So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, BUT OF GOD WHO SHOWS MERCY»

In other words, it is not how much we run. It does not have to do with our power and efforts but rather with the mercy of God. Without His mercy, of our own selves, we can do nothing (John 5:30, 15:5).

Keeping on, Romans 9:22-24 tells us:

Romans 9:22-24

«*what* if God, wanting to show *His* wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering, the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the VESSELS OF MERCY, which He had prepared beforehand for glory *EVEN US* whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?»

Though there are vessels of wrath, we are NOT of them. In contrast, we are vessels of mercy that God prepared beforehand to know the riches of His glory. HE PREPARED US FOR GLORY! His mercy is from generation to generation. As Luke 1:50 tells us:

Luke 1:50

«His mercy *is* on those who fear Him, from generation to generation»

And as Psalms 25:10 say:

Psalms 25:10

«ALL THE PATHS OF THE LORD *ARE* MERCY AND TRUTH, to such as keep His covenant and His testimonies»

Continuing in Psalms and the subject of mercy, we give below some further characteristic references to it:

Psalms 33:18

«Behold, the eye of the Lord *is* on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His **mercy**»

Psalms 32:10

«He who trusts in the Lord, **mercy** shall surround him»

Psalms 33:5

«The earth is full of the **mercy** of the Lord»

Psalms 36:7-10

«How precious *is* Your **lovingkindness** [mercy- same Hebrew word as in all other places], O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of your wings. They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your pleasures. For with you *is* the fountain of life; In your light we see light. Oh, continue your **lovingkindness** [mercy] to those who know you, and your righteousness to the upright in heart.»

Psalms 57:10

«Your **mercy** reaches unto the heavens, and your truth unto the clouds.»

Psalms 63:3

«Your **lovingkindness** [mercy] *is* better than life»

Psalms 69:16

«Your **lovingkindness** [mercy] *is* good»

Psalms 86:15

«But you, O Lord, *are* a God **full of compassion**, and gracious, longsuffering and **abundant in mercy** and truth»

Psalms 103:13, 17

«As a father pities [the Hebrew word means «to love deeply, have mercy, be compassionate»] *his* children, *SO* **THE LORD PITIES THOSE WHO FEAR HIM**..... the **mercy** of the Lord *is* from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him..»

Psalms 89:14

«**Mercy** and truth go before Your face»

Psalms 103:11

«For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His **mercy** toward those who fear Him»

Psalms 103:1-4

«Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, *bless* His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and **tender mercies**»

Psalms 118:1

«Give thanks to the Lord, for *He is* good! For His **mercy** endures forever»

Though there are many other references to the Lord's mercy, summarizing what we have seen till now:

- God is rich in mercy, and He has begotten us again according to His abundant mercy.
- All His ways are mercy and truth and these are going before Him.
- All the earth is full of His mercy. His mercy remains from generation to generation to those that fear Him.
- His eye is on those that trust in His mercy and mercy surrounds them.
- His mercy is good and precious. It is better than life!
- As a father pities His children, so the Lord pities those that fear Him.
- His mercy on us is as big as the distance of heaven from earth and He crown us with mercy and lovingkindness.
- We are vessels of mercy, prepared by Him for glory!

3. More examples of the Lord's mercy.

Moving further, we will see some more examples of the Lord's mercy as these are given in the Bible. Thus, it was the Lord's mercy on Abraham, that lead his servant in the land of his ancestors, to find a wife for Isaac. After all that is recorded in Genesis 24:1-25 and after meeting Rebecca, Isaac's future wife, the servant:

«bowed down his head and worshipped the Lord. And he said, «Blessed be the Lord God of my master, who has not forsaken His mercy and His truth toward my master.»

It was the Lord's mercy that saved Lot and his family from Sodom's destruction:

Genesis 19:17-19

«So it came to pass, when they [the angels] had brought them outside, that he said, «Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed.» Then Lot said to them, «Please no, my lords! Indeed now, your servant has found favor in your sight, and YOU HAVE INCREASED YOUR MERCY which you have shown me by saving my life»

It was the Lord's grace and mercy that kept Joseph during the first difficult years in Egypt:

Genesis 39:21

«But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison»

Despite the difficulties, that were all in the plan of the Lord, the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy.

4. «Let us therefore come boldly....»

The mercy of the Lord is not something that is given with measure. It is not something the Lord gives sometimes. He does not have mercy on us on a periodic basis but rather on a permanent basis. IT IS A CHARACTERISTIC OF HIS VERY NATURE. As He advises us in Hebrews 4:

Hebrews 4:14-16

«Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin. LET US THEREFORE COME BOLDLY TO THE THRONE OF GRACE, THAT WE MAY OBTAIN MERCY AND FIND GRACE TO HELP IN TIME OF NEED»

We need mercy. There is no-one that does not need it. Let's therefore come boldly to the throne of grace to receive what we need. Let's open our hearts to God. Let's ask for His mercy and compassion on us, as David did in respective situations:

Psalms 4:1

«have mercy on me, and hear my prayer.»

Psalms 6:2

«Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I *am* weak»

Psalms 9:13

«Have mercy on me, O LORD! Consider my trouble from those who hate me»

Psalms 25:16

«Turn Yourself to me, and **have mercy on me**, For I *am* desolate and afflicted.»

Psalms 30:10

«Hear, O LORD, and **have mercy on me**; LORD, be my helper!»

Psalms 31:9

«**Have mercy on me**, O LORD, for I am in trouble;..... Make Your face shine upon Your servant; Save me for Your mercies' sake.»

Psalms 51:1

«**Have mercy upon me**, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions.»

Psalms 86:16

«Oh, turn to me, and **have mercy on me**! Give Your strength to Your servant, And save the son of Your maidservant.»

Psalms 123

«...as the eyes of servants *look* to the hand of their masters, As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, So our eyes *look* to the LORD our God, until He has mercy on us. **Have mercy on us**, O LORD, have mercy on us!»

None of those that sought the Lord's mercy left empty. Really:

The two blind men

Matthew 9:27-31

«When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, "SON OF DAVID, HAVE MERCY ON US!" And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." Then He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith let it be to you." AND THEIR EYES WERE OPENED.»

The woman of Canaan

Matthew 15:22-28

«And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "HAVE MERCY ON ME, O LORD, SON OF DAVID! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.» But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us." But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw *it* to the little dogs." And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great *is* your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." AND HER DAUGHTER WAS HEALED FROM THAT VERY HOUR.»

The child with the demon

Matthew 17:15, 18

«LORD, HAVE MERCY ON MY SON, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water.....And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; AND THE CHILD WAS CURED FROM THAT VERY HOUR.»

Another two blind men

Matthew 20:30-34

«And behold, two blind men sitting by the road, when they heard that Jesus was passing by, cried out, saying, "HAVE MERCY ON US, O LORD, SON OF DAVID!" Then the multitude warned them that they should be quiet; but they cried out all the more, saying, "HAVE MERCY ON US, O LORD, SON OF DAVID!" So Jesus stood still and called them, and said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Lord, that our eyes may be opened." So JESUS HAD COMPASSION and touched their eyes. AND IMMEDIATELY THEIR EYES RECEIVED SIGHT, and they followed Him.»

5. Conclusion

The Lord's mercy and compassion for His children is really without measure, as the distance of heavens from the earth. We are vessels of mercy, vessels prepared by Him for glory! He has surrounded us with His love and compassion. He is rich in mercy. To reiterate the invitation of Hebrews 4

Hebrews 4:16

LET US THEREFORE COME BOLDLY TO THE THRONE OF GRACE, THAT **WE MAY OBTAIN MERCY** AND FIND GRACE TO HELP IN TIME OF NEED»

Tassos Kioulachoglou

«He is not far»

This article will be about the presence of God in our lives and His communication with us. Regarding His presence, Acts 17:27-28 tells us:

Acts 17:27-28

«so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, THOUGH HE IS NOT FAR FROM EACH ONE OF US; "FOR IN HIM WE LIVE AND MOVE AND HAVE OUR BEING»

Sometimes, we think that God is up there, and between Him and us there is a tremendous gap. Nonetheless, this is not what really happens. As His Word makes clear: THE LORD IS NEAR TO EACH ONE OF US and in Him we live and move and have our being. In other words, wherever you are right now, the Lord fills the place. He is very close to you! He is by you, NOW.

1. I Corinthians 2

Concerning the topic of God's presence and His communication with us, in I Corinthians 2 we read:

I Corinthians 2:9-12

«But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed *them* to us through His spirit. For the spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what

man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.»

[NKJV - KJV]

It is impossible to know something from God without having His spirit. Without His spirit, we would be in complete ignorance of Him. However, PRAISE THE LORD THIS DOES NOT HAPPEN. In order not to be in ignorance, God gave us His spirit, so that we may know the things He has granted to us. As the Lord said in another place:

John 15:26, 16:13-15

«But when the comforter comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the spirit of truth which proceeds from the Father, he will testify of Me..... When he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth; for he will not speak on his own *authority*, but whatever he hears he will speak; and he will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for he will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that he will take of Mine and declare *it* to you.»

[NKJV-KJV]

The comforter, the spirit of truth, is here today. IT IS IN EACH ONE OF US THAT BELIEVES THAT JESUS IS LORD AND GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD (Romans 10:9-10). It was given to tell us the things to come - to glorify the Lord and lead us into all the truth. This is not a supposition, something that...may perhaps happen. It is something that HAPPENS! It is the reality of each born again believer that walks in fellowship with God. Turning again to I Corinthians we read:

I Corinthians 2:16

«For who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.»

and again in Isaiah:

Isaiah 54:13

«All your children *shall be* taught by the LORD»

and Philippians 2 continues:

«for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.»

We have the mind of Christ! We are taught by the Lord. It is God who works in us to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Concluding the above: the Lord has given us His spirit to communicate with us. This spirit is here TODAY. It is in every born again believer, and has been given so that we may know what God has prepared for us. We are no longer in ignorance. We now have the comforter, the promise of the Father that has come to guide us to all truth and tell us things to come.

2. The still small voice

Leaving for a moment the New Testament, we will go to I Kings 19. There we find Elijah, a prophet of God, who being persecuted by Jezebel, walked for many days to finally arrive at Horeb. There the Lord met him and verses 9-13 tells us:

I Kings 19:9-13

«And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" So he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life." Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, *but* the LORD *was* not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, *but* the LORD *was* not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, *but* the LORD *was* not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. So it was, when Elijah heard *it*, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave.»

We sometimes think that God can be found only in the impressive occurrences of life, in «earthquakes and fire». We ignore perhaps that He is also in the routine things of everyday life. Of course there will be unique situations in life. Yet, the Lord is not in them only. For the believer that walks in fellowship with God, his mind is the mind of Christ. As we read in I Corinthians 2:16

I Corinthians 2:16

«For who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.»

We have the mind of Christ! This mind does not work only sometimes, nor its function is necessary linked with «earthquakes and fire». Christ is not somewhere where He cannot be found. He is in us. By being in unity with Him, His mind becomes our mind and His thoughts our thoughts. As we saw in Philippians:

Philippians 2:13

«for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.»

God works in us to will and to do for His good pleasure. We don't need to struggle to hear from Him. Yet, we do need to be in fellowship with Him. We do need to allow Christ to «dwell in our hearts through faith;» so that we may know «what *is* the width and length and depth and height and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.»

3. «That Christ may dwell in our hearts»

As we saw in the above, God has given us His spirit and we have the mind of Christ. However, the fact that we have the mind of Christ does not mean that we also put it in use. In the same way, the fact that we have holy spirit does not mean that we also walk in the spirit. This becomes evident by the many references-admonitions of the Word of God to walk by the spirit, the new nature and not by the flesh. Really, in Ephesians 3:14 - an epistle whose

first verse makes clear that refers to believers («to the saints who are in Ephesus and faithful in Christ Jesus») - we read:

Ephesians 3:14

«For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His spirit in the inner man, **THAT CHRIST MAY DWELL IN YOUR HEARTS THROUGH FAITH**; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.»

Despite the fact that Paul speaks to «saints and faithful to Christ Jesus», he still prays that **CHRIST MAY DWELL IN THEIR HEARTS**. This in turn means that the fact that one is a believer does not automatically imply that Christ dwells in his heart, exactly as the fact that one has holy spirit does not automatically make him spiritual (see for example I Corinthians 3:3-4). As the Word says in Romans 8:

Romans 8:5

«For those who **live** according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those *who live* according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.»

Where one sets his mind on, depends on how he lives. We cannot live according to the flesh and at the same time have our minds set on the things of the spirit. Continuing in Romans 8:

Romans 8:6-8

For to be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.»

Those that live according to the flesh, have the mind of the flesh and what the flesh minds is enmity against God. Life and peace have only those that have the spirit, **AND ALSO HAVE THE MIND OF THE SPIRIT**. And as Romans again says:

Romans 8:9-10

«But you are not in the flesh but in the spirit, if indeed the spirit of God **DWELLS** in you. Now if anyone does not have the spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the spirit *is* life because of righteousness.»

We are not in the flesh if the spirit of God **DWELLS** in us²⁶. It is the inhabitation of Jesus Christ in our hearts that that brings life, peace and all the other that compose the fruit of the spirit (see Galatians 5). Turning again to Romans 8:

Romans 8:12-14

«Therefore, brethren, we are debtors not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of

²⁶ Remember here Paul's prayer for believers: «**THAT CHRIST MAY DWELL IN YOUR HEART THROUGH FAITH**»

the body, you will live. FOR AS MANY AS ARE LED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD, THESE ARE SONS OF GOD.»

With the above, our aim is not to doubt our standing in Jesus Christ. What we do want however, is to make clear that life, peace and communication with the Lord is not the result of the existence of the mechanical parts (spirit) only or even of the accurate knowledge about them. It is also required the inhabitation of Christ in our hearts, the mind of the spirit. The Lord is not only interested to see us receive the spirit but also WALK BY THE SPIRIT. The communication with the Lord should not be thought as the communication of two separate parts. I believe it does not only have significance «how many words» one has heard from the Lord but also the unity one has with Him. As the unity with Christ is realized, our heart will have Christ; our mind will be the mind of Christ and our thoughts will be His thoughts. In such a case, we no longer speak for a simple communication - that can anyway exist even between two parts with no relationship with each other - but for something much deeper, something that includes communication: WE SPEAK FOR FELLOWSHIP. It is within such a framework that I believe one should see the communication with God and it is within this framework that this is realized naturally and without any struggle.

Tassos Kioulachoglou

The living water

In John 4 we find Jesus speaking to a Samaritan woman. After he first asked her for water, in verse 10 he said:

John 4:10

«Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, "Give me a drink," you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."»

And the Lord continues:

John 4:13-14

«Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.»

Whoever drinks of the water the Lord gives will never be thirsty. There is no other water appropriate to satisfy our thirstiness for life than the water the Lord gives. Who is thirsty for life? Who has been tired by the wilderness of this world? The Lord has good news for him. He, the captain of life, has the living water. If He is put in the midst of one's heart, not only the water He gives will rid him of thirstiness but will also make him «a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life»

«He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst»
(John 6:35)

Tassos Kioulachoglou

«The iniquity of Sodom»

Sodom and Gomorrah are two well known places in the Bible. Sodom was the place where Lot, Abraham's brother, initially choose to dwell. Regarding the area, Genesis 13:10 tells us that it was «well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord». Evidently, it was a very rich and fertile land. Its people were probably wealthy and their welfare level was high relative to other areas. They didn't have food or water shortages as their land was fertile and well watered. It was these characteristics that attracted Lot and made him to choose this place to dwell. As Genesis 13:10 tells us: Lot «lifted his eyes and saw», making his choice according to what he saw. However, what we may see by «lifting our eyes», though may look excellent, it may not be what the Lord sees with His own eyes (I Samuel 16:7). And really, what Lot saw, was greatly different of what the Lord saw by looking into the hearts. Really, in Genesis 13:13 we read:

Genesis 13:13

«But the men of Sodom *were* exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord»

Though what the Lot saw was an excessively fertile land, what the Lord saw was an excessively dirty heart. As He says in Genesis 18:20:

Genesis 18:20

«Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave»

At the end, after the Lord saved Lot, He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. When Lot was leaving Sodom, the advice of the Lord was the exact opposite of what he had done in the beginning:

Genesis 19:17

«so it came to pass, when they had brought them outside, that he [the angel of the Lord] said, «Escape for your life! DO NOT LOOK BEHIND...»

When Lot choose Sodom as his dwelling place, he made his choice after he «lifted his eyes and saw». Now he was to flee and «never look behind». After Lot left, the Lord destroyed the area.

However, what was the sin of Sodom? Ezekiel 16:49-50 tells us what the Lord saw:

Ezekiel 16:49-50

«Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: she and her daughter HAD PRIDE, FULNESS OF FOOD, AND ABUNDANCE OF IDLENESS; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abomination before me; therefore I took them away as I saw *fit*»

It impressed me greatly when I saw that «fullness of food and abundance of idleness [rest]» were, together with pride, among the things that composed «the iniquity of Sodom»²⁷. And though pride is generally rejected, at least outwardly, this does not happen with the other two: the fullness of food and the abundance of rest. In contrast, these are many times considered, even by Christians, as aims. Of course we do not say that we should be weary and hungry. What we say though is that fullness of food and abundance of rest, in contrast to what the world says: ARE NOT things we should pursue after. In contrast, what we should pursue is the Lord, His Word and His purposes. The center and the purpose of our life is not idleness and riches but to do the will of God. To know and make known the Father and His wonderful Son the Lord Jesus Christ. As Sodom ceased to exist, this world will also one day cease to exist. And as the Lord took Lot out of that place and then He destroyed it, so also He will take us out of this world, before He does the same to it.

Let's us therefore be ready and watchful. The Lord is coming. And «as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed *them* all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.....Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.» (Luke 17:28-33).

Tassos Kioulachoglou

The will of God

The will of God will never take you,
 Where the grace of God cannot keep you,
 The will of God will never take you,
 Where the arms of God cannot support you,
 The will of God will never take you,
 Where the riches of God cannot supply your needs,
 The will of God will never take you,
 Where the power of God cannot endow you.
 The will of God will never take you,
 Where the Spirit of God cannot work through you,
 The will of God will never take you,
 Where the wisdom of God cannot teach you,
 The will of God will never take you,
 Where the army of God cannot protect you,
 The will of God will never take you,
 Where the hands of God cannot mold you.
 The will of God will never take you,
 Where the love of God cannot enfold you,
 The will of God will never take you,
 Where the mercies of God cannot sustain you,
 The will of God will never take you,
 Where the peace of God cannot calm your fears,

²⁷ To avoid misunderstanding, the purpose of this article is not to count the iniquities of Sodom but to concentrate on what is written in Ezekiel 16:49-50.

The will of God will never take you,
 Where the authority of God cannot overrule for you.
 The will of God will never take you,
 Where the comfort of God cannot dry your tears,
 The will of God will never take you,
 Where the Word of God cannot feed you,
 The will of God will never take you,
 Where the miracles of God cannot be done for you,
 The will of God will never take you,
 Where the omnipresence of God cannot find you.

Author Unknown

The 23rd PSALM - A New Approach

The Lord is my Shepherd --- THAT'S RELATIONSHIP!
 I shall not want --- THAT'S SUPPLY!
 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures --- THAT'S REST!
 He leadeth me beside still waters --- THAT'S REFRESHMENT!
 He restoreth my soul --- THAT'S HEALING!
 He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness --- THAT'S GUIDANCE!
 For His name sake --- THAT'S PURPOSE!
 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death ---
 THAT'S TESTING!
 I will fear no evil --- THAT'S PROTECTION!
 For thou art with me --- THAT'S FAITHFULNESS!
 Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me --- THAT'S DISCIPLINE!
 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies ---
 THAT'S HOPE!
 Thou anointest my head with oil --- THAT'S CONSECRATION!
 My cup runneth over --- THAT'S ABUNDANCE!
 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life ---
 THAT'S BLESSING!
 And I will dwell in the house of the Lord --- THAT'S SECURITY!
 Forever --- THAT'S ETERNITY! AMEN

Author unknown

Articles

- **John the Baptist: A God's General**
- **Repentance**

- “Do you not remember...?”
- The blind Bartimaeus

John the Baptist: A God's General

I recently read the book: «God's generals» by Roberts Liardon. For those that have not read it, it is a book that speaks about famous ministers that acted in the 19th and 20th centuries. For each of the figured ministers there is a biographical account of their high and low times, together with comments by the author. Affected by this, I was thinking today to have a look at the account the Bible gives for a God's general well known among Bible students, namely for John the Baptist.

1. Not superhuman

I believe God has put the stories of such men as John, Paul, Elijah etc. in the Bible to teach us and show us their lives as an example. Many tend to think that these people were somehow superhuman and there is little or no similarity with the rest of us. However, this is not the case. As James characteristically says concerning Elijah:

James 5:17

«Elijah **was a man subject to like passions as we are**»
(KJV)

and as Peter also said to Cornelius when he bowed down to him:

Acts 10:26

«Stand up; **I myself am also a man**»

And earlier, when the people gazed at Peter and John, after the healing of a lame, Peter said:

Acts 3:11-13, 16

«...why you look so intently at us, **as though by our own power and godliness we had made this man walk**? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus..... And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong whom you see and know»

The people of God we read about in the Bible and wonder at the works God did through them, were by no means superhuman. They were all men «subject to the same passions as we are» As Paul says in II Corinthians:

II Corinthians 3:4-6

«And we have such trust through Christ toward God. **Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but OUR SUFFICIENCY IS FROM GOD, WHO [GOD] ALSO MADE US SUFFICIENT AS MINISTERS OF THE NEW COVENANT,** not of the letter but of the spirit»

It is GOD that is our sufficiency. John, Paul, Peter, Elijah were no more «sufficient» than any of us. It is not needed to be superhuman, super sufficient, to do what God has called you. It is HE that is super sufficient and He certainly is as sufficient for us as He was for any of those that desired to walk with Him in the past.

2. John the Baptist

After this small introduction, let's now turn to John the Baptist. The angel that announced his birth to his father, said about him:

Luke 1:15-17

«For **he will be great in the sight of the Lord,** and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the holy spirit even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and the power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord»

and as Jesus said later:

Matthew 11:9-11a

«But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you and more than a prophet. For this is *he* of whom it is written: «Behold I send my messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You». Assuredly I say to you, **among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist;** but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he»

The last statement is not to reduce John's significance. He would be «great in the sight of the Lord». Among those born of women, none had yet risen greater than him. John had a call for his life. He was to be the forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ. «To make ready a people prepared for the Lord». He had a mission to accomplish, and he was ordained for it even before his birth. Yet, this is true not for him only. As the Scripture says, we have been foreknown by God (Romans 8:29), and each one of us has been set by Him in the body of Christ with a certain function (I Corinthians 12:8). As John's function was to be the forerunner of Christ and this function was defined by God, so also we have a function in the body, a call, that God has defined especially for each one of us. For sure, we are not accidentally on this earth. Instead, we are well known, may be not to men but certainly to God our Father.

3. In the wilderness

Not many things are written for the time before John started preaching. Luke 1:80 sums up this period as follows:

Luke 1:80

«So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts **till the day of his manifestation to Israel**»

John was in the deserts **till the day of his manifestation to Israel**. He had a call from the very beginning. Yet, there was also an appointed time for its manifestation. ALL we have a function in the body of Christ, yet it is GOD that defines this function as well as how it will be manifested. As it says in I Corinthians 12:18

I Corinthians 12:18

«But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body **JUST AS HE PLEASED**»

You do not have to seek for a place in the body of Christ. God has already placed you there and He has done it just as He pleased. HE alone has designed a function **FOR YOU**, He has ordained you for this function and He has equipped you to do it. Moreover, He has also defined HOW AND WHAT you will do in your function. John's call was to prepare the way of the Lord and he knew it from the very beginning. One would imagine that as soon as he knew it, he should have stopped anything else and start preaching. Yet, John did this only after «the word of God came to him» (Luke 3:1-6). As soon as he had it, he step ahead to do it. Really Luke 3:1-6 tells us:

Luke 3:1-6

«Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galille, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, **the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias IN THE WILDERNESS**. AND [after the word of God came to him] he went into all the region around the Jordan, PREACHING a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of Isaiah the prophet, saying: «The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God»

John was appointed by God with a special function. He was to be the forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ, to prepare the way of the Lord, and preach the baptism of repentance. He could go ahead from the very beginning and do what he might have thought would satisfy his mission in the best way. He could have come up with one thousand ideas, about how he was to fulfill his mission better. Yet he didn't do this. Instead he waited till he had a word from God. As soon as he had it, and without a second thought, he started doing what he was told: preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. God has appointed us in the body of Christ with a certain function, defining also how and what we will do in our function. John didn't start preaching but ONLY WHEN «THE WORD OF GOD CAME TO HIM». And this happened..... **in the wilderness**. This was John's «training center». The times we may not appreciate at all, the deserts, may really be the very times God use for our

training. Then, when the flesh and its actions are broken there, we will be ready to do, not what we think we should do for Him, but what HE HAS CALLED US TO DO from the very beginning.

4. «To the multitudes that came out»

And the gospel of Luke continues:

Luke 3:7-9

«Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, «Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, «We have Abraham as *our* father.» For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire»«

«The multitudes came out to be baptized by John». It was not John that tried to attract them though. For sure, he was not diplomatic when he called their generation «Brood of vipers». Obviously, he didn't try to please them. Instead, he spoke what God wanted him to speak in the volume He wanted him to speak it.

John's ministry prospered as he followed what God had appointed him to do. He didn't do any miracle (John 10:4), at least there is no record of one. He didn't advertise himself. Yet, the people knew they had encountered a prophet. There are people today going around and say «I'm a teacher» or «I'm a prophet». John didn't do this. He didn't make a campaign commending himself as a prophet. In fact, you will nowhere find him saying he was a prophet. Yet, the people knew it. The Lord confirmed it.

If John lived today, millions would have come to him. However, John was not after the multitudes. When his ministry was up to the skies, with multitudes coming to him and when everyone was thinking that he might be the Christ, John «confessed and did not deny»:

John 1:21-23

«I am not the Christ.» And they asked him, «What then? Are you Elijah?» He said, «I'm not.» «Are you the Prophet?» And he answered, «No.» Then they said to him, «Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?» He said: «I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: make straight the way of the Lord,» as the prophet Isaiah said»

John didn't try to take for himself all those popular titles as Christ, Elijah or the prophet - though prophet and Elijah were titles that would fit very well to him. He was these. Yet this was not the point. What was the point was **that he was doing what he had been appointed to do**. He was to be a voice of one crying in the wilderness and that's exactly what he was. Our concern should not be to get a title, a name, but to do what God has appointed us to do, whatever this may be and **regardless of the name it may have**.

5. «All are coming to Him»

John's popularity was very high. He was very famous Till Jesus' ministry started. It seems that when the Lord's ministry started, John ministry reached an end. The once

popular minister was now watching the multitudes to leave him and follow the Lord. What was his reaction? John 3 tells us:

John 3:26-30

«And they came to John and said to him, «Rabbi, he who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified - behold, He is baptizing, and **all are coming to Him!**» John answered and said, «A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, «I'm not the Christ», but «I have been sent before Him» He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. **Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.**»

John was not after the multitudes and thus he didn't feel uncomfortable seeing his ministry decreasing. In contrast, when the time arrived, he show to the people to turn away from him to follow the Lord and this was his joy. At the end John ended up into prison, where he was beheaded. As Hebrews 11 says for those that as him had a martyr's death:

Hebrews 11:35-38

«Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheep skins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented - of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in dens and caves of the earth*»

John - as well as those of Hebrews 11:35-38 - was a man like us. Yet, **he was determined**. He could have denied his call and just live as all the others of his age (he was around 30!). It would have been much more easier. Wouldn't it? Yet, he preferred to follow God. The Christian way may have times of discomfort, times where you know that it would be much more easier in other paths. We will be able to walk in those narrow ways, only when our vision, the one we are looking at, is the Lord Jesus Christ. As Hebrews again says:

Hebrews 12:1-2

«let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, LOOKING UNTO JESUS THE AUTHOR AND FINISHER OF *OUR* FAITH, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.»

The only way to run the spiritual race is by LOOKING UNTO JESUS CHRIST. Not at the things that are seen but at those that are not seen, the eternal.

II Corinthians 4:18

«we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal»

Tassos Kioulachoglou

Repentance

In Judges 10, we find the record of the Israelites fighting against the Ammonites. Verse 6 describes Israel's spiritual condition at that time:

Judges 10:6

«Then the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baalims and the Astoreths, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the people of Ammon and the gods of the Philistines; and they forsook the Lord and they did not serve Him»

As they had done many times in the past, the children of Israel abandoned the Lord, and followed the gods of the various nations around. The Lord was not indifferent with this behavior. Verses 7-9 tell us:

Judges 10:7-9

«So the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel; and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the people of Ammon. From that year they harassed and oppressed the children of Israel for eighteen years - all the children of Israel who *were* on the other side of the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, in Gilead. Moreover the people of Ammon crossed over the Jordan, to fight against Judah also, against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was severally distressed»

The fruit of Israel's behavior, was deep distress. At the end, the people whose gods they chose to serve, became their own oppressors. Fortunately, in their distress they turned again to the Lord. Verse 10 tell us:

Judges 10:10

«And the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, saying, «We have sinned against You, because we have both forsaken our God and served the Baals!»

As the prodigal son of the Luke's gospel, made the decision to return home - confessing his sin - when the once rich land was hit by famine, so also the Israelites, during this deep distress, turned to the Lord and confessed their sin to Him. Then verses 11-14 give us the Lord's reply:

Judges 10:11-14

«So the Lord said to the children of Israel, «*Did I not deliver you* from the Egyptians and from the Amorites and from the people of Ammon and from the Philistines? Also the Sidonians and Amalekites and Maonites oppressed you; and you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hand. Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods. Therefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress»

Israel was God's chosen people. He had saved them time after time, again and again, only to see them betraying Him once more. However, would He not forgive them any longer? Had His forgiveness finished and He would reject Israel forever? Verses 15-16a tell us what the children of Israel did after the Lord's reply:

Judges 10:15-16a

«And the children of Israel said to the Lord, «We have sinned! Do to us whatever seems best to You; only deliver us this day, we pray. **So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord.**»

The first time Israel went to the Lord, THE FOREIGN GODS WERE STILL IN THEIR MIDST. They confessed they had sinned. However, had they TRULY REPENTED when they were still keeping their foreign gods? The confession of the sin is not necessarily repentance for the sin. Genuine repentance has to do with the heart and it is accompanied by a change of the heart. In verse 10, the Israelites confessed they had sinned but the foreign gods were still there. That's why I believe God pointed them to the idols when He said «go and cry to the gods you have chosen». These gods were still there!! It is only in verse 16 that Israel put them away and started serving the Lord again. Immediately after this, we read about the Lord's reaction:

Judges 10:16

«And His soul could no longer endure the misery of the Israel»

As soon as Israel truly repented - and this was now obvious by their respective actions - God was there to deliver them once more. As soon as they repented, the Lord could no longer endure their misery. Judges 11 - 12 describe us how He delivered them from the people of Ammon. He didn't do it because of their righteousness or because he was sure they would not turn away again. In fact, in chapter 13 we see them turning away once more. He did it just because He loved them, and once they had honestly returned to Him, He was there, regardless of what they had done or what they would do in the future.

1. God's heart-the case of Ahab

I love the historical books of the Old Testament. It is like small biographies that show how the Lord worked with various people, evil and good. There, in I Kings, we find among others the record of a very evil king, the king Ahab. I Kings 16:30-33 and 21:25 give us his «CV» and his «achievements»:

I Kings 16:30-33

«Now Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, MORE THAN ALL WHO WERE BEFORE HIM. And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and he went and served Baal and worshipped him. Then he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a wooden image. AHAB DID MORE TO PROVOKE THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL TO ANGER THAN ALL THE KINGS OF ISRAEL WHO WERE BEFORE HIM.»

And I Kings 21:25

«But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up. And he behaved very abominably in following idols, according to all *that* the Amorites had done, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel»

Ahab is described as the most evil king of Israel. No one was like him in evilness. Elijah, confronted this king in I Kings 21. There we read:

I Kings 21:20-22

«So Ahab said to Elijah, Have you found me O my enemy? And he answered, «I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the Lord: Behold I will bring calamity on you. I will take away your posterity, and will cut off from Ahab every male in Israel, both bond and free. I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, because of the provocation with which you have provoked *Me* to anger, and made Israel sin»

This was the Lord's verdict against Ahab. He and his family would not have a good end. Yet, let's not think that this pleased God. As Ezekiel 18:23 says:

Ezekiel 18:23

«Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? says the Lord God, and not that he should turn from his ways and live?»

God's pleasure is not in judging the wicked but in seeing them repenting. WHOEVER REPENTS IS ACCEPTABLE TO HIM. Would however this be available even for Ahab, the most evil king of Israel? Verses 27-29 tell us:

I Kings 21:27-29

«So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about in mourning. And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, SEE HOW AHAB HAS HUMBLLED HIMSELF BEFORE ME? BECAUSE HE HAS HUMBLLED HIMSELF BEFORE ME, I WILL NOT BRING THE CALAMITY IN HIS DAYS» in the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house»

The Lord's judgment was upon the whole house of Ahab. However, his repentance and the fact he was humbled before the Lord, were enough to postpone the judgment for the great evil he and his family had done. Unfortunately, his family and he himself later, continued in evilness - see for example I Kings 22 and II Kings 3:1-3 - and the decision of the Lord that Elijah announced, was indeed carried out in the days of Joram, Ahab's son (see II Kings 9-10)

2. God's heart: the case of Manasseh

Ahab was not the only king of Israel that did evil. In fact, there were many others that behaved like him. One of the them, king of Judah this time was Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, who unfortunately is not known for the same reasons as his father. In the summary of his kingdom given in II Chronicles 33:2, 9 we read:

II Chronicles 33:2

«he [Manasseh] did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel».

and II Chronicles 33:9

«So Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do **more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel**»

As it seems, Manasseh was the counterpart of Ahab in Judah. Both of them surpassed in evil the nations that inhabited the land before! The evilness of Manasseh and the people was confronted by the Lord but with no result: they would not REPENT. Verses 10-11 tell us:

II Chronicles 33:10-11

«And the Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they would not listen. **Therefore** [as a result of their response] the Lord brought upon them the captains of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze fetters, and carried him off to Babylon»

The Lord tried to correct the king and his people. He didn't want to see Manasseh in the state he ended up with. However, without repentance this was unavoidable. Fortunately, as with the Israelites in Judges 10, the resulted affliction was also a turning point for Manasseh, who started now seeking the Lord!

II Chronicles 33:12-13a

«Now when he [Manasseh] was in affliction, he implored the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed to Him»

When Manasseh was in Jerusalem, in peace, God would speak but Manasseh would not listen. Now that he was in chains, it was Manasseh's turn to start speaking to God, HUMBLING HIMSELF BEFORE HIM. And let's see whether the Lord listened:

II Chronicles 33:13

«and [after Manasseh humbled himself before the Lord] He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord *was* God»

When he was in Jerusalem, Manasseh became another champion of evilness. When however in affliction he turned to the Lord, He didn't start calculating the evil this king had done. Instead «He received his entreaty» and restored the repented king back to his throne.

3. God's heart: The case of Nineveh

This case is the topic of the short book of Jonah. The Lord spoke to Jonah and gave him a specific assignment. Verses 1 and 2 tell us:

Jonah 1:1-2

«Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, «Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me»

We all probably know what Jonah initially did and how he disobeyed God - his case could very well be one more case in this article. However, in chapter 3 we see him going finally to Nineveh:

Jonah 3:1-4

«Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, «Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you» So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three day journey. And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, «Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown»

What God wanted through Jonah was to warn Nineveh for the coming judgment, if they didn't repent. Verses 5-9 tell us how the people of Nineveh received the Lord's warnings.

Jonah 3:5-9

«So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. For word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered *himself* with sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he caused *it* to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, «Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell *if* God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?»

In contrast to Manasseh, the people of Nineveh PAID ATTENTION TO WHAT GOD WAS SAYING, and the king with his nobles commanded all to fast and pray. Then verse 10 tells us what the Lord did:

Jonah 3:10

«Then God saw their works [not simply their words], that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, AND HE DID NOT DO IT»

God relented from what He would do to Nineveh, and this because the people of Nineveh REPENTED.

4. Conclusion

Though sin blocks the way to God, repentance opens it widely. Even in such cases as those of Ahab and Manasseh, this way was wide open, when they humbled themselves before the Lord. The question therefore is not whether the Lord will forgive us. His forgiveness is given, if there is REPENTANCE. If therefore we have sinned, have we REPENTED? Not just in words but GENUINELY in the heart. Have we mourned and wept for the sin or we just continue with the same hardened heart, deceiving ourselves that ... there is no problem and justifying the sin instead of repenting for it? Here is what James suggests:

James 4:8-10

«Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up»

In all cases we have seen, the repentance was accompanied by a change of the heart, by mourning for the sin and by humbling before the Lord. May the Lord open our eyes and may we open our hearts to Him, making them transparent, without hidden parts, excuses and reasonings. May those of us that we are not in his hug, DRAW NEAR TO HIM, REPENTING, AND HE WILL DRAW NEAR TO US AS WELL.

Tassos Kioulachoglou

«Do you not remember?»

It was a very busy day. Jesus, the disciples and a large multitude were out in the wilderness. Imagine, the Lord leading and behind His people following Him and you will get what should always be the case. BEFORE, FIRST OF ALL, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST LEADS THE PATH, and behind Him ALL of us following. Then Mark 8, verses 1-3 tells us:

Mark 8:1-3

«In those days, the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples *to Him* and said to them, „I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with me three days and have nothing to eat. And if I sent them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar»

THE LORD HAD COMPASSION CONCERNING THE NEEDS of those men. He has compassion on those that follow Him on the way. He is merciful to each and every soul that follows Him and desires to care for their cares. «Cast all care upon God, for He cares for you» the Holy Spirit said later through Peter, one of the guys that were there that day. Continuing with Mark, the Lord had compassion on the multitude and called His disciples. He could do everything alone. However, He preferred to call His disciples and communicate to them His concern for the others. Then the disciples thought it well and answered starting with a how:

Mark 8:4

«Then His disciples answered Him, «How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?»»

Jesus didn't ask them to tell him the «how», but it is there where their mind immediately went. The Lord communicates with us things, but instead of saying «Yes Lord, that would great», we say «How can this be done?» looking probably at our selves and our own abilities. The Lord replied to their question, with another question:

Matthew 8:1-5

«He asked them, «How many loaves do you have?» And they said «Seven»

What was seven loaves for those people? Well too many in the hands of the Lord. Whatever is put on His hands is multiplied. And so it was with those seven loaves:

Mark 8:6-7

«So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, broke *them* and gave *them* to the disciples to set before *them*; and they set *them* before the multitude. They also had a few small fish; and having blessed them, He said to set them also before *them*.»

The Lord didn't ask the disciples to make the bread themselves. The only that He asked them was to give Him the seven loaves and the few fishes they had and then take plenty of bread and fishes FROM HIS HANDS AND SET THEM BEFORE THE PEOPLE. God's servants are not asked to make the bread, but to TAKE THE BREAD FROM THE LORD'S HANDS AND SERVE IT TO THE PEOPLE. And verse 8 continues:

Mark 8:8

«So they ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments.»

Only the food that comes from the Lord's hands is able to fill the Lord's household. Our own food, the seven loaves, will keep ourselves and the people to whom we deliver it hungry. His food however, is enough to fill all and to even leave leftovers.

«Do you not remember?»

But our story does not stop here. Few verses later we read:

Mark 8:14-16

«Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat. Then He charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, «*It is because we have no bread*»

These people were the very people that had distributed miraculously-made bread to four thousand men. And yet, just hours latter, they were reasoning that they didn't have enough bread. Obviously, what the Lord had done, had not touched them. Yes, they had done the job, they had distributed the bread, yet their hearts were untouched. It is not enough just to do the work, but also to do it with your HEART. If you don't do it with your heart, you may have distributed many loaves from the Lord's hand and still thinking of your own one little loaf. Then the Master replied:

Mark 8:17-21

«But Jesus being aware of *it*, said to them, «Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? AND DO YOU NOT REMEMBER? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up? They said to Him twelve. And when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up? And they said «Seven.» So He said to them, «How *is it* you do not understand?»

How really they didn't remember? How really we don't remember? REMEMBER MY FRIEND, REMEMBER ALL THE WONDERFUL THINGS THE LORD HAS DONE FOR YOU. Take your mind away from the sounds of the reasonings and thoughts, from yourself and your one little loaf of bread. If your walk is by sight and not by faith you will only go as far you have loaves. Yet the Lord can make loaves out of nothing. The loaf you will put in His hands will bring forth thousands more, able to feed you and many others. In Luke 22:35 He asked the disciples:

Luke 22:35

«And He said to them, «When I sent you without money bag, knapsack and sandals, did you lack anything?» So they said Nothing»

NOTHING is needed to serve the Lord except obedience to Him, AND NOTHING WILL BE MISSING FROM YOU WHEN YOU SERVE HIM.

Mark 10:28-30

«Then Peter began to say to Him, «See, we have left all and followed you.» So Jesus answered and said, «Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time - houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions - and in the age to come, eternal life.»

Tassos Kioulachoglou

The blind Bartimaeus

In Mark 10:46 we read:

Mark 10:46

«Now they came to Jericho. As He went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great multitude, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the road begging.»

Who knows how many years was Bartimaeus blind. Most probably all his life. For all his life without any visual contact with the environment, he was sitting there, by the road, begging. For sure, he must have heard what Jesus did to other blind men and how they received their sight. Really, how much he must have longed to be one of those that would meet Him. And he was:

Mark 10:47

«And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, HE BEGAN TO CRY OUT AND SAY, «JESUS, SON OF DAVID, HAVE MERCY ON ME!»»

«Jesus, have mercy on me» Bartimaeus cried out. «Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks» says the Scripture (Matthew 12:34). You will not cry out to the Lord when your heart is closed to Him. The voice - its tone, sound, content - reflects the heart. Bartimaeus was longing for the Lord, and the Lord was there. The others started murmuring: «Why Bartimaeus makes so much noise?» However, he was no longer listening to them:

Mark 10:48

«Then many warned him to be quiet; but he cried out ALL THE MORE, «Son of David, have mercy on me!»»

Bartimaeus was desperately looking for the Lord. He would cry out to Him, till he was heard. And Jesus heard him. Bartimaeus' cry made Him to stay still. A whole multitude was following Him, but the cry of this blind beggar was so valuable to Him. It was like He was looking for it. So He stood still and called him:

Mark 10:49-51

«So Jesus STOOD STILL and commanded him to be called. Then they called the blind man saying to him, «Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you.» And throwing aside the garment, he rose and came to Jesus. So Jesus answered and said to him, «What do you want me to do for you?»»

The Lord stands still at the cry of those that call Him. For Him, each and every soul is very valuable, regardless of color, race or position. He does not look at names and titles but at human hearts and all, without any exception, need Him the same. Till they meet Him they are blind, and all that meet Him, receive their sight. As Acts 26:18 says

Acts 26:18

«**to open their eyes**, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God»

Only the Lord can give the light of life. Only the appointment with Him can make a soul to receive its sight, and only his dwelling at a man's heart can make it alive and bright. Turning to Bartimaeus:

Mark 10:51

«The blind man said to Him, «Rabboni, that I may receive my sight.» Then Jesus said to him, «Go your way; your faith has made you well.» And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road»

Bartimaeus could have one thousand doubts about calling on the Lord («what the people will say; I should first ask the priests to tell me what they believe about this Jesus; O, it is OK here; at least I survive»). However, do you know what the result would be? HE WOULD STAY BLIND FOREVER. Jesus will not heal all the blind but only the blind that want to receive their sight and thus cry out to Him. He passes by you. You can stay trapped in your thoughts and reasonings. You can think about it as long as you want and doubt if you desire. But my friend, you know what? You are going to stay BLIND forever. If you don't cry to the Lord YOUR soul - your own soul - will never receive its sight, and not only that but you will never have a part in the eternal life. Because, when the Lord was passing by you you didn't invite Him; you didn't open the door to Him. Instead, you locked yourself in the chains of your pride and egoism and... you were thinking about it. So, go ahead. Break these chains!! What is the good they gave you? CRY OUT AS THE BLIND BARTIMAEUS: JESUS SON OF GOD, HAVE MERCY ON ME. Then the Lord Jesus Christ will stop for you, yes for you personally, as he stopped for Bartimaeus. He will stop and give you what you so much need: THE LIGHT OF LIFE

John 1:9-13

«That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN HIS NAME: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God»

Tassos Kioulachoglou

Articles

- **He is alive now!**
- **“Examine yourselves...”**
- **“From among yourselves..”**
- **Your most valuable luggage**
- **The Christian Radio in Turkey**
- **A word is able.....**

He is alive now!

This month Christianity was celebrating the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. I would like therefore to use this opportunity to have a look at this event.

1. Resurrection: Not an event of the past

Most historical events concern actions of men that are not present any longer. In contrast to these, the resurrection commemorates the fact that Jesus Christ, though died on the cross for man's sins 2.000 years ago, HE IS STILL ALIVE TODAY! Three days after His crucifixion, God raised Him from the dead!

Peter, summarising the events of crucifixion and resurrection, said on the day of Pentecost:

Acts 2:22-33

«Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves also know him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; WHOM GOD RAISED UP, HAVING LOOSED THE PAINS OF DEATH, BECAUSE IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE THAT HE SHOULD BE HELD BY IT. For David says concerning him: «I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; Moreover my flesh will also rest in hope. For you will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will you allow your holy one to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in your presence.» Men *and* brethren let *me* speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God has sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. THIS JESUS GOD HAS RAISED UP, OF WHICH WE ARE ALL WITNESSES. THEREFORE BEING EXALTED TO THE RIGHT HAND OF THE THRONE OF GOD, HE Poured OUT THIS WHICH YOU NOW SEE AND HEAR»

Jesus Christ is not a personality to be remembered only by history. He is not someone that lives only through his written teachings. IN CONTRAST, **JESUS IS AN ALIVE AND ACTIVE PERSONALITY NOW! HE IS SEATING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE THRONE OF GOD NOW! HE IS POURING OUT THE SAME SPIRIT THAT HE Poured OUT ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST, NOW! HE CAME TO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS AND HE DOES THIS NOW! HE IS IN YOU THAT BELIEVE IN HIM, NOW! JESUS IS ALIVE NOW! AND WILL BE ALIVE FOREVER! AMEN.**

2. He is alive now: He is blessing us

In Acts 3 we read:

Acts 3:18-20

«But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all his prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, SO THAT TIMES OF REFRESHING MAY COME FROM THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD, AND THAT HE MAY SEND JESUS CHRIST, WHO WAS PREACHED TO YOU BEFORE»

And Acts 3:26:

«To you first, **God having raised up His servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you**, in turning away every one of *you* from your iniquities»

Jesus Christ is the most important one in history. Yet, He is not just «history». He is the most significant one to be remembered. Yet, He is not just a memory. Jesus is much more than this: HE IS A REALITY! A reality revealed to everyone that believes in Him. As He was revealed to Paul, in Acts 9:

Acts 9:1-6

«Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, «Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?» And he said, «Who are you Lord?» Then the Lord said, «I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.» So he, trembling and astonished, said, «Lord, what do you want me to do?» Then the Lord *said* to him, «Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.»

Paul was armed from top to bottom with one single purpose in mind: to kill the Lord's disciples. He had never imagined though, that on the way he would meet the Lord himself! He probably thought that he was dead. But HE WASN'T! HE WAS ALIVE, and his revelation to Paul that day turned the once great persecutor of the church to the great apostle we all know.

Turning to us, the same Jesus that was revealed to Paul that day is also revealed to men and women today. As Jesus himself said in John 14:21

John 14:21

«He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and **I WILL LOVE HIM AND MANIFEST MYSELF TO HIM**»

Jesus is ALIVE AND ACTIVE NOW, MANIFESTING HIMSELF to everyone that loves him.

3. Matthew 28:20

It was only some days after the resurrection, and in a mountain in Galilee, the disciples had an appointment with the Lord. There he gave them what came to be known as «the Great commission». Matthew 28:18-20 tells us:

Matthew 28: 18-20

«And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, «All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; AND LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, *EVEN TO THE END OF THE AGE*»

To many of us this commission is something **WE** have to accomplish BY OURSELVES. But I believe when Jesus gave it, he didn't mean something like this. For, giving it, he also said: «I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, *EVEN TO THE END OF THE AGE*». In accomplishing the great commission and in serving the Lord, **we are partners with him**. He is the Head of the church, the one that gives commands and helps us to carry them out. His commands are NOT a missing leader's commands. In contrast, they are the commands of an alive, active leader, who works together with his people **TODAY**, TO ACCOMPLISH THE PURPOSES OF HIS KINGDOM.

4. He is alive now: He instructs us

In Acts 9, immediately after the Lord's meeting with Paul, there is the record of Ananias, a disciple in Damascus. Let's go to verses 10-18 and have a look at it:

Acts 9:10-18

«Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in vision, «Ananias.» And he said, «Here I am, Lord.» So the Lord *said* to him, «Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for *one* called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting *his* hands on him, so that he might receive his sight.» Then Ananias answered, «Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priest to bind all who call on your name.» But the Lord said to him, «Go, for he is a chosen vessel of mine to bear my name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake»

The only that Ananias knew about Paul was that he was someone that persecuted the Lord's saints. It was the Lord himself that arranged for him to go and meet Paul. The Lord knows how to arrange things, though nothing may seem possible to be arranged. He knew how to arrange for Ananias to meet Paul. He knew how to arrange for another Ananias to come and meet YOU, when you called him.

And something else noteworthy: the Lord knows each one of us, as he knew Ananias: by name. He is the good shepherd that knows each one of his sheep, and each one of his sheep knows him. As he said in John 10

John 10:3-4, 14-15, 27-29

«and he calls his own sheep BY NAME and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ..I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD; AND I KNOW MY *SHEEP*, AND AM KNOWN BY MY OWN. As the Father knows me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.... MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE AND I KNOW THEM, AND THEY FOLLOW ME. AND I GIVE THEM ETERNAL LIFE AND THEY SHALL NEVER PERISH; NEITHER SHALL

ANYONE SNATCH THEM OUT OF MY HAND. MY FATHER WHO HAS GIVEN THEM TO ME IS GREATER THAN ALL; AND NO ONE IS ABLE TO SNATCH OUT OF MY FATHER'S HAND.»

The same good shepherd of John 10, the Lord Jesus Christ, is in charge of the sheep today as well. He knows us by name. he speak to us as he spoke to Ananias: calling us with our first name. May when he calls us we give him the same reply Ananias gave: «Here I'm Lord».

5. «Where there are two or three....»

Most of us probably know the below passage of Matthew 18:20:

«Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I'm there in the midst of them»

What this passage very plainly says, is that every gathering of believers done in the name of Jesus, brings Jesus in the meeting. Not of course as a passive visitor but as an active member. Do you remember those two that were on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35)? They were discussing about the Lord, and the Lord joined them in person, explaining to them the scriptures and opening their minds to understand them. Exactly this happens today when believers are gathered in Jesus name: Jesus becomes an active member of the meeting, opening the minds and the understanding of those that want to learn about him. Through his spirit, he explains the Scriptures, he teaches, he admonishes. And wherever there are two or three gathered in his name, Jesus is there as well. He never misses an appointment.

6. He is alive now: He encourages us

We probably remember from the gospel records, the Lord to give strength and encourage the people. We probably remember him saying: «Be of good cheer», «do not fear».

Well, this has not stopped with the gospel records. Jesus is here today and as Hebrews 13 says «He is the same today, and yesterday and till the end of the age» (Hebrews 13:8).

As Paul characteristically said in Philippians 4:13

Philippians 4:13

«I can do all things THROUGH CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS ME»

He didn't say: through Christ that strengthened me. It is PRESENT. JESUS STRENGTHENS US NOW.

Let's see an example of the Lord's encouragement as it is given in the book of Acts. The apostle Paul went to Jerusalem where the fanatic Jews captivated him and put him into prison. Probably no one else was able to reach him there. No-one, except one: THE LORD. As Acts 23:10-11 tells us:

Acts 23:10-11

«Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring *him* into the barracks. BUT THE FOLLOWING NIGHT THE LORD

STOOD BY HIM and said, «**Be of good cheer, Paul**; for as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.»

And later as Paul again said to Timothy:

II Timothy 4:16-17

«At my first defence no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. **BUT THE LORD STOOD WITH ME AND STRENGTHENED ME**, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion»

THE LORD STOOD BY PAUL AND STRENGTHENED HIM! Paul was not labouring for someone that said nice words and then died and the only that was left was his words. Who could stand by Paul then? PAUL AND EVERY ONE OF US, IS LABOURING FOR AN ALIVE LORD: THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. The Jesus of the gospels is not a historical but AN ALIVE JESUS, FULL OF THE SAME LOVE AND COMPASSION TODAY, FOR EACH ONE OF US.

7. He is alive now: He is coming back

Closing this short study on the resurrected Jesus Christ, we couldn't forget the fact that as Jesus ascended into heaven 40 days after the resurrection, so also he will come back from heaven. As the angels said to the disciples, who were gazing at Jesus ascending into heaven:

Acts 1:9-11

«Now when he had spoken these things, while they watched, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, «Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? THIS *SAME* JESUS, WHO WAS TAKEN UP FROM YOU INTO HEAVEN, WILL SO COME IN LIKE MANNER AS YOU SAW HIM GO INTO HEAVEN»»

Revelation 1:7

«BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH CLOUDS, AND EVERY EYE WILL SEE HIM, EVEN THEY WHO PIERCED HIM. AND ALL THE TRIBES OF THE EARTH WILL MOURN BECAUSE OF HIM. EVEN SO, AMEN»

and Matthew 24:30-31

«Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, AND THEY WILL SEE THE SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN WITH POWER AND GREAT GLORY»

Jesus is coming back with power and great glory. To this, we say:

«Yes, come Lord Jesus!» (Revelation 22:21)

Tassos Kioulachoglou

«Examine yourselves...»

I was thinking recently the picture given in I Timothy 1:18. There, we find Paul giving instructions to Timothy:

I Timothy 1:18-20

«This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, HAVING FAITH AND A GOOD CONSCIENCE, WHICH SOME HAVING REJECTED, CONCERNING THE FAITH HAVE SUFFERED SHIPWRECK, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme»

Some, of whom were also Hymenaeus and Alexander, concerning the faith suffered shipwreck. These people were not unbelievers. **To suffer shipwreck in the faith, it implies that sometime they were in the faith.** As Paul again says, speaking this time for Hymenaeus and Philetus:

II Timothy 2:17

«And their message will eat like canker, of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus, WHO HAVE STRAYED CONCERNING THE TRUTH, saying that the resurrection is already past; **and they overthrow the faith of some**»

(NKJV-KJV)

One is strayed when he is on the way and he loses it. Something like this happened also with Hymenaeus, Alexander and Philetus: concerning the truth, they had strayed; concerning the faith, they suffered shipwreck. And unfortunately they are not the only ones. Their case, though it is an example to be avoided, has many things to teach us.

Is the keeping of the faith something granted?

When I first knew the Lord I believed that yes, the keeping of faith is something granted and it is impossible to lose it. However, through the years I saw that my belief was not correct. **The keeping of faith is NOT something granted.** If it was there would not be in the Word of God the warnings we will see today, nor the Word of God would ever speak for people that concerning the faith suffered shipwreck. I believe that the Christian life and faith is not something instantaneous, something that finishes with the confession of Romans 10:9-10. Instead, it is something that has duration, a way that as long as we live we should walk. It certainly starts with the confession of Romans 10:9-10, but it doesn't finish there.

A. II Timothy 4:6-9

In II Timothy Paul, now reaching the end of his life, gives instructions to Timothy. There, in verses 6-9 he gives a short account of his life:

II Timothy 4:6-9

«For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I HAVE FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT, I HAVE FINISHED THE RACE, I HAVE KEPT THE FAITH. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing»

If faith was something that started and finished the day that Paul believed, he wouldn't have said: «I KEPT THE FAITH». The faith is indeed something that needs to be KEPT. While Paul kept the faith, Hymenaeus and Alexander made a shipwreck concerning the faith.

See also that Paul in this account of his life didn't say: «I planted so many churches, I wrote so many books, I preached to so many crowds, I made thousands to believe». At the end of his ministry, his account was very simple: **I HAVE FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT, I HAVE FINISHED THE RACE, I HAVE KEPT THE FAITH.**

The Christian life is a fight, a race, a path that one has to walk. It starts the day we believed in the Lord but it doesn't finish there. Only at the end, and after he had first said that he is «already being poured out as a drink offering», only then Paul speaks using past tense concerning the faith, the race and the fight. Only then, little before the end of his journey on this earth, Paul draws the line for the final account.

In contrast to him, many brethren we believe that the race finished the day we believed, and that our faith will never be in danger. Obviously, Paul would not agree with us. Probably this is also the reason that many of us cannot understand him, when in Philippians 3:12-14 he says:

Philippians 3:12-14, 17

«Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; BUT I PRESS ON, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. BRETHREN I DO NOT COUNT MYSELF TO HAVE APPREHENDED; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward **the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.** Brethren, join in following my example»

In contrast to Paul, many brethren count themselves as having already attain the prize. «Since I believed and was saved, I can now live as I wish. I have already received the prize» many of us think. The Christian life for Paul was not like this. It was not something static, «a stop to get salvation, and then we continue as before». In contrast, it was something dynamic, a fight, a race that he had to run. As he again says in Hebrews 12:1-2

Hebrews 12:1-2

«LET US RUN WITH ENDURANCE THE RACE THAT IS SET BEFORE US LOOKING UNTO JESUS THE AUTHOR AND THE FINISHER OF *OUR* FAITH, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat at the right hand of the throne of God.»

The Christian life is indeed a race, a road we should run by looking unto Jesus. The faith is something that we need to keep.

«EXAMINE YOURSELVES AS TO WHETHER YOU ARE IN THE FAITH», says Paul in II Corinthians 13:5. Are we in the faith or we live our lives based on a distorted view that

justifies sin ...because we are now under «grace»? Let's examine ourselves, lest we become disqualified in something. As Paul again says:

I Corinthians 9:24-27

«Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? RUN in such a way that you may obtain *it*. And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for an imperishable crown*. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as *one who* beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified»

B. The parable of the sower

This is a well known parable to most of us. Jesus there spoke for 4 categories of men relative to the effects that the seed, the Word of God, had for them. In Luke 8:11-15 we read:

Luke 8:11-15

«Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. But the ones on the rock *are those* who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who BELIEVE for a while and in time of temptation fall away. Now the ones *that* fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. But the ones *that* fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep *it* and bear fruit with patience.»

The second and third categories of this parable, were always a question to me. These categories, didn't reject the word, at least immediately. In contrast, the seed sprang up, **yet it didn't give fruit**. As the Lord clearly says for the second category, «THEY BELIEVE» but only «for a while». Though the seed of the Word springs up in all the three categories, it is only the last one that is able to give fruit. The other two, while they had faith, in the way it disappeared. **To tell it differently and more openly: the fact that someone made a confession of faith in Jesus Christ does not automatically classifies him in the fourth category**. The category to which we belong is dependant on what will happen on the way, in our walk with God from this day onwards. The day that we made our confession it was the day that the seed sprang up. However, how this seed will grow it is not something that one can know from the beginning. The only right account is the final account. Only at the end can someone speak as Paul, using past tense.

Some traps that can put the faith in trial and to which no-one should give in, are recorded in the above passage of Luke 8 and are examined more extensively below.

I. Temptations

As James 1:14-15 says: «But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death» No-one should give in to temptation. There will be times where we will have to decide between God and «OUR OWN DESIRES». There will be critical crossroads, times where we will have to chose whether we will follow God's way or our own way. At such times, the people of the second category, forsake God and run again after their own lusts. If there is no repentance and return, the results can really be devastating.

II. Tribulation / Persecution for the Word

This cause is given for the same category in Mark's record of the parable of the sower (Mark 4:17). As Paul says concerning the results of tribulation: «no-one should be shaken by these afflictions» (I Thessalonians 3:3). The afflictions and tribulations shake the people of the second category. Though they initially believed, they are not immovable in temptation and tribulation. As soon as these appear in the arena, they prefer to change their way.

III. Love of money, greediness, deception of riches

For this trap, Paul says:

I Timothy 6:9-10

«But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. FOR THE LOVE OF MONEY IS THE ROOT OF ALL *KINDS OF* EVIL, FOR WHICH SOME HAVE STRAYED FROM THE FAITH IN THEIR GREEDINESS, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows»

The Bible contains references to people of God that were extremely rich, as Abraham (Genesis 13:2, 24:35) and Job (Job 1:3). **However, they were not greedy, lovers of money.** When Job in one moment lost everything, his reaction was very simple:

Job 1:21

«Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord»

The problem is not with money itself but with the love of money. The problem with Balaam the prophet, was not that he didn't ask God, but that he «LOVED the wages of unrighteousness» (II Peter 2:15) so much that he ran after them.

IV. Cares

Another obstacle for the growth of the seed of God's Word is cares. As Christ warns:

Luke 21:34

«But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you unexpectedly.»

Cares make the believer's heart heavy and choke the seed of the Word. Instead of first, God takes a second or a lower position and He is somehow considered not so relevant for meeting the needs. The covering of cares becomes our personal responsibility, and not God's responsibility as He invites us:

I Peter 5:7

«casting all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you»

When we consider God as not relevant with our cares and we keep them on us, the cost is that in the Word of God we will become fruitless. Though one day we had heard the

Word and believed it, we left this seed to be choked by cares and our unbelief to trust them to God.

V. Pleasures of life.

The Lord spoke concerning the results of this trap in the passage of Luke we gave previously. A very obvious example of the effects of this trap is a well known man of God: Solomon.

The richest king of Israel, the one to whom God had given so much wisdom that kings from other nations were coming to listen to him, at the end «TURNED HIS HEART» away from God and His Word. As I Kings tells us:

I Kings 11:1-9

«But king Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, *and* Hittites – from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, «You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.» Solomon clung to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For it was so, when Solomon was old, THAT HIS WIVES TURNED HIS HEART AFTER OTHER GODS; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as *was* the heart of his father David. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord and did not FULLY follow the Lord, as *did* his father David..... so the Lord became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice.»

And Nehemiah 13:26

«Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin.»

When Solomon was born, the Lord sent Nathan the prophet and called him Jedidiah that means «Beloved of the Lord» (II Samuel 12:24-25). He gave him so much wisdom that they were coming from other kingdoms to speak with him (I Kings 10). Yet, all these do not mean that Solomon had a good end. The reason is that HIS HEART TURNED AWAY, and «he did not FULLY follow the Lord». At the end he fell into the traps he himself was teaching that should be avoided (Proverbs 2:16-19, 5:20, 6:24): his palace was a collection of all sort of foreign women, with of course the respective consequences - his wives turned away his heart from God.

Regardless of how hard the old man tries to persuade you that there is no problem if you are a bit lax toward sin, since... at the end of the day you don't harm anyone.... do not give ear to him. «A little leaven leavens the whole lump» says the Word of God (I Corinthians 5:6). There is no compromise with sin that is without effects on your fruitfulness. The sin as well as the cares, the greediness and all other traps make the heart heavy, lukewarm. Who really could imagine that the man that so fervently taught that one should keep away from foreign women at the end would have dozens of them? Despite the fact that God reprovved Solomon (I Kings 11), he didn't change. He was so blind that his heart no longer understood the error or it was indifferent about it.

VI. Falsely called knowledge / Heresies

This cause is given in I Timothy 6:20-21, where Paul instructing Timothy said:

I Timothy 6:20

«O Timothy! **Guard what was committed to your trust**, avoiding the profane *and* idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge - by professing it SOME HAVE STRAYED CONCERNING THE FAITH»

Also, as we already read previously, concerning Hymenaeus and Philetus:

II Timothy 2:17

«And their message will eat like canker, of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus, WHO HAVE STRAYED CONCERNING THE TRUTH, **saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some**»

Hymenaeus and Philetus, had strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past. As one can see from the Word of God, the apostles many times warned against wrong, dangerous teachings. John warned that every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh was the spirit of the antichrist (I John 4:3). The apostles came together in Jerusalem to face teachings that went around wanting the disciples to circumcise and follow the law (Acts 15). As Paul also says in I Timothy 4:1-3:

I Timothy 4:1-3

«Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times SOME WILL DEPART FROM THE FAITH, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.»

Let's be careful where we turn our ear. It is not the person that makes something wrong or right but the Word of God. Is what we hear in agreement with the Word of God? It does not matter whether it sounds good or not, different or not from «traditions». Only the truth can set one free. All else, even if it is like the truth, or sounds nice or seems full of knowledge will enslave. If today someone feels his relationship with God is in a difficult position a serious I think reason is the existence of wrong beliefs concerning God and the Bible: we have in our minds a god **we** have constructed, and who is NOT the God of the Bible. The trials make also such things to show up.

Conclusion

What I believe should probably be clear from the above is that the Christian life didn't finish the time we confessed Jesus as Lord. Yes, it started there, but for sure it didn't finish there. There is a good race we have to run, a good fight we have to fight. The confession we then made is proven true or not every day. Is Jesus Christ our Lord TODAY? As we saw Paul instructing Timothy:

I Timothy 6:20

«O Timothy! **GUARD what was committed to your trust,**»

When a seed falls on the earth does not grow instantaneously. So also the seed of the Word of God. Its evolution is something dynamic. In all three cases of the parable of the sower, the seed sprang up, yet only in the last one it gave fruit.

Let's follow Paul's example and instead of imagining ourselves as having reached the end, as having attained the prize, let's count ourselves as RUNNING for it. Not as perfect but as running towards perfection. The decision to give our life to Jesus Christ is indeed something we decide everyday. Does our life belong to Jesus TODAY? It cannot belong both to Him and to the world. Yet, many believe that it can. The result is hypocrisy and double mindness. If you are in a situation like this, there is a way out. God CAN help you. Draw near to Him and He will draw near to you. Decide that for your life there is nothing more valuable than Him. Give your life to Him FULLY. Here is what James suggests:

James 4:7-10

«**Therefore SUBMIT TO GOD.** Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and *your* joy to gloom. **Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up**»

and Proverbs 22:4

«By humility and the fear of the Lord *are* riches and honour and life»

Real life is found in the humility and the fear of the Lord.

And to close, let's turn to II Corinthians 13:5, the verse we borrowed as title to this article:

II Corinthians 13:5

«Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?»

Tassos Kioulachoglou

«From among yourselves»

In Acts 20 we find Paul travelling to Jerusalem. This would be his last journey to places where he preached the Word and made disciples of Christ. Thus, reaching Ephesus, he sent and called for the elders of the local church:

Acts 20:17

«From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church»

These people were elders, i.e. people old in the faith, overseers - as the verses that follow make clear - that the Holy Spirit had set to shepherd the church of God. In his meeting with them, Paul after reminding them the way he walked when he was among them, he carries on with the following warning:

Acts 20:28-31

«Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS MADE YOU OVERSEERS, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ALSO FROM AMONG YOURSELVES MEN WILL RISE UP, SPEAKING PERVERSE THINGS, TO DRAW AWAY THE DISCIPLES AFTER THEMSELVES. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears»

The fact that the people Paul had before him were overseers set by the Holy Spirit to shepherd the church of God, DOES NOT MEAN that they were excluded by this warning. Among these people, that till then shepherded the church of God, there would be some that one day instead of leading the disciples behind Christ, as they used to do, they would start leading them behind themselves. A ministry can start very well. A servant of God may have been set by Him in the ministry; the Lord Himself may have set him to oversee. Yet, what started well DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN THAT WILL ALSO CONTINUE WELL. Some will serve as they should. However, some others will not. Though God put them in the ministry, giving them gifts to serve His people, at the end they will turn and use these gifts to make the disciples follow them instead of Christ. My brother, if you serve the people of God, be careful to turn the people to Christ and not to yourself. Be careful that the one that you point the people to is Christ and not you.

«You will know them by their fruit»

The elders of the church of Ephesus that would go astray and for whom Paul is speaking, are put in the same category with the wolves that after Paul's departure would come among them without sparing the flock. The difference between a sheep and a wolf in the church of God is not in the outside: in the outside they both look like sheep. Instead, the difference is in the fruit they give. As the Lord said:

Matthew 7:15-23

«Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to Me, «Lord, Lord» shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, «Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?» And then I will declare to them, «I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!»

It is interesting that the Lord speaks about those who will not enter into the kingdom of heaven, immediately after his reference to the false prophets and how one can recognise them. The false prophets will also say «Lord, Lord». In Christ's name they will also do miracles and will cast out demons and will prophesy. However these do not make them true, genuine disciples. It is not the words, the wonders or the prophecies that mark the genuine from the non-genuine, the wolf from the sheep, but the FRUIT that one gives. And we speak here for the fruit of Galatians 5:

Galatians 5:19-21

«Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; OF WHICH I TELL YOU BEFOREHAND, JUST AS I ALSO TOLD *YOU* IN TIME PAST, THAT THOSE WHO PRACTICE SUCH THINGS WILL NOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD»

Someone may say that knows the Lord. He may also have done wonders in His name. He may have prophesied in Christ's name. However, do these make him a real sheep or give him entrance into the kingdom of God, if his fruit is the fruit of the above passage? Well, as the Lord said and as Paul also repeats: NO! As James also says:

James 2:14-18

What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone SAYS he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, «Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,» but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead. But someone will say, «You have faith, and I have works.» Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.»

Many brethren have been confused with the above passage. Especially the phrase «Can faith save him?» has perplexed many. However the passage does not speak for the true faith, but for the faith that someone **SAYS THAT HE HAS**. «If someone SAYS he has faith». **THE FAITH THAT EXISTS ONLY IN WORDS, DOES NOT SAVE.**

Romans 10:9-10 does not say that «if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus will be saved». What it says is:

Romans 10:9-10

«if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus **AND BELIEVE IN YOUR HEART THAT GOD HAS RAISED HIM FROM DEAD, YOU WILL BE SAVED.** For **with the heart one believes** unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation»

«**WITH THE HEART ONE BELIEVES**». A confession is true **when the heart agrees with it.** And when there is faith in the heart then there will also be the respective fruit. «EVERY GOOD TREE BEARS GOOD FRUIT but a bad tree bears bad fruit. **A good tree cannot bear bad fruit,** nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.» It is IMPOSSIBLE to have faith AND NOT HAVE THE RESPECTIVE FRUIT.

Externally, both the wolf and the sheep seem the same: they both look like sheep. However it is the fruit that makes the difference. While the wolf makes a fruit respective to Galatians 5:19-21, the sheep makes fruit respective to Galatians 5:22-23:

Galatians 5:22-23

«But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law»

Let's therefore take heed to ourselves (Acts 20:28). Let's examine ourselves whether we are in the faith (II Corinthians 13:5). What kind of fruit comes out of our hearts?

Galatians 5:19-21 or Galatians 5:22-23. There is no profit in saying «Lord, Lord» and in making big statements, when our hearts are not OK. There is no point to honour the Lord with our lips WHEN OUR HEART IS FAR FROM HIM.

Isaiah 29:13

«Therefore the Lord said these people draw near with their mouths and honour Me with their lips, **but have removed their hearts far from Me**»

and I Samuel 16:7

«For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, **but the Lord looks at the heart.**»

It is the heart that the Lord is interested in. Let this therefore be clean, a house clean for the Lord, full of faith and good fruits.

Tassos Kioulachoglou

Your most valuable luggage

It is not a long time ago that this incidence happened: one of my work colleagues came at my office, telling me that leaving the train she forgot to get her luggage with her. She was travelling that night and her grief was so big.

Then, the next day I was thinking about this incidence: there are many people, that would grief very much over a material loss, a chance loss, a desire loss and yet, may not care at all at THE loss: THE LOSS OF THEIR OWN SOUL. Jesus in Luke 12:15-21 gave a parable we may find relevant:

Luke 12:15-21

«And he said to them, Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses. Then he spoke a parable to them, saying: the ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, «What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?» So he said, «I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and goods. And I will say to my soul, «Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, *and* be merry.» But God said to him, Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?»

This man cared so much for everything else, yet he forgot the most important: HIS OWN SOUL.

There are millions of people, that follow the philosophy of this man today. «Eat drink and be merry» or as Paul put it in another place: «Eat and drink for tomorrow we die» (I Corinthians 15:32). They take care of every other thing, except their own soul. My friend the most valuable thing you have is not your crops, your possessions, your career etc. The most valuable thing you have IS YOUR OWN SOUL. If you desire to lose it, you can lose it. It is your choice.

However, if you don't have such a desire, God has made a special provision for this purpose, called Jesus Christ. As he says in John 3:16-18

John 3:16-18

«For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him SHOULD NOT PERISH but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might BE SAVED. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God»

and Romans 10:9-10

«if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation»

The answer to the question of perishing or not perishing, of losing or not losing your soul, is equal to the answer you will give to the question of believing or not believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those that believe will never perish. Those that do not believe will perish. There is an invitation that God has extended to every man, including you as well: the invitation to believe with your heart in Jesus Christ as Lord and in His resurrection. To believe that He is the Messiah, the Son of God and in so doing to receive the gift of salvation. Will you accept this invitation? Will you repent and accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour? HE IS THE ONLY ONE THAT CAN SAVE THE MOST VALUABLE YOU HAVE: YOUR SOUL.

Matthew 11:28-30

«Come to me, all *you* who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke *is* easy and my burden is light»

If you haven't done it yet, do it today: give today your life to the Lord Jesus Christ, as he invites you. Put your burdens on him and he will give you rest.

«For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?» (Matthew 16:26)

Tassos Kioulachoglou

I know it sounds unbelievable. Yet, it is true. At a time where Christianity is subtly persecuted in various so called.... «Christian countries»; At a time where the government of a «Christian» nation as Greece shuts down radio stations that spread the gospel, and other countries as France and USA do not hesitate to take to the court those that speak about Christ in the schools, the Lord shows that His work does not stop. The prayer that is and was offered for unreached nations as Turkey, yea gives fruit.

I was very pleasantly surprised when one day as I was working on the page of the magazine, I found the link to a Turkish Christian radio station, that broadcasts from Istanbul to all the area through the FM band and to all the world through the Internet! My eyes and ears couldn't believe it, till I visited the station's page. This is: <http://www.gnmmujde.com/>. But it is not only the station that broadcasts 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to Istanbul and the suburbs (a potential audience of about 30-35 million people according to the station). Mustafa and Canet Efe have extended their work to many other Christian activities. As their page on the Internet says:

«Mujde Yayincilik (Good News Publishing) is the one and only independent Christian publishing institution in Turkey which was established with local capital. Mujde Yayincilik has been working with many other Christian organizations of the world. Mujde Yayincilik, entered through the doors which the Lord had opened and began to work in many unique projects. We have established the first official evangelistic FM radio station, the first official evangelistic Bible correspondence course and the first official evangelistic ministry group. We had the privilege to offer the New Testament to the Turkish president and to government ministers. We are working on publishing 20 million scripture portions which will be distributed by the government. We have released the first Jesus movie and audio cassette in Kurdish and we are helping the ICI University with official theological training in Turkey. Soon we hope to further serve the Christian Community by providing Web based Christian Television Broadcasts. We are determined to carry on with such projects under the guidance of the Lord.»

The above are nearly unbelievable, but that's how it is with the miracles of the Lord: they look unbelievable, and the above are really miracles. Miracles that show that the prayer and the effort to reach this country of over 60,000,000 people were not without fruit. As I visited the page I also understood how it happened and last year someone from Istanbul had asked me to send him a Turkish New Testament. I was wondering then, how he heard the word. But as it seems God has a strong light in this big city. God hears every prayer and may He raise up more people like Mustafa and his wife both in Turkey and in other parts of the earth; Christian servants that will not hesitate to present the true message of the gospel to their fellow men. I would like to encourage you to send a word of support to our brother at the following email address: gnmmujde@gnmmujde.com

A word is able ..

An un-careful word is able to steer up a fight
 A hard word is able to destroy a life
 A bitter word is able to pass on hate
 A harsh word is able to wound and to tear down

A good word is able to soft the pain
 A pleasant word is able to make the day happy

A word in season is able to decrease the stress
A compassionate word is able to heal and give strength
(From the Greek magazine «The voice of the gospel»)

Really what kind of word are we speaking?

«A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver» (Proverbs 25:11)