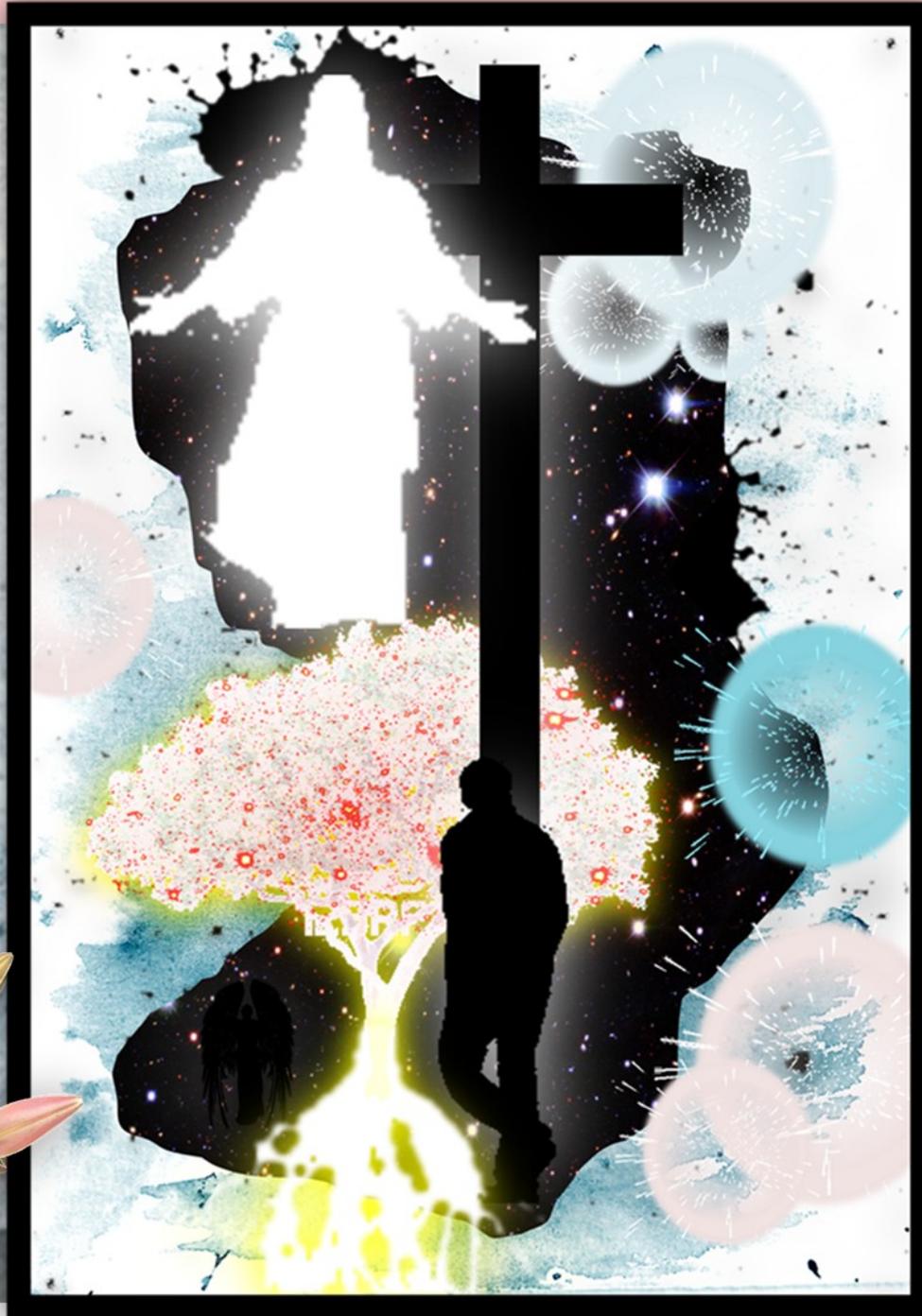


Obedience

"For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one Man's obedience the many will be made righteous." (Romans 5:19)



The Berean Lamp
For the Body of Christ.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Value of Obedience
by Scott Moller - Page 3

I Have Come To Do Your Will, O God
by Nathan Warner - Page 6

Honoring Obedience
by Steve Hiebert - Page 11

Prayer of Wanderers (Poem)
by Nathan Warner - Page 13

Sing a New Song - Page 14

Trust and Obey
by Maggie Moller - Page 14

The Obedience of Faith
by Ginny Larsen - Page 16

His Flock Among the Lilies
by Lynn Warner - Page 18

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The Berean Lamp Ministry seeks to:

1. Encourage and strengthen the Body of Christ by providing the means for each of its members to share their spiritual gifts with one another, rooted in the Word of God, thereby growing into deeper union with one another and with Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).
2. Minister to non-believers; be a witness for Christ and a testimony to His Body in the world.

We would appreciate your help in contributing to the content and in spreading the work of this ministry. Thank you, and God bless.

- Pastor Scott Moller





The Value of Obedience

By Scott Moller

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”

(Psalm 51:10)

Some time ago I wrote this note in my Bible at the end of the book of Jonah: “In sin I am utterly useless to God!” We certainly see this in the life of Jonah. Unfortunately, in this Age of Grace, many Christians are living as if obedience is optional in their lives. Most evangelical churches have taught the precepts of Ephesians 2:8&9 well: that by grace we are saved through faith **not by works** so that no one can boast. Most often the teaching stops at that point, leaving the impression that good works have little value because they have no part in our salvation. What is missed is verse 10: *“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* We were created to do good works not to assist in our salvation, but to fulfill God’s purposes.

Our assigned, “good works”, cannot be accomplished when we are living in sin, disobedience or rebellion to God. While living in this condition, the “good works” usually do not happen, but even when they do, they most often arise from the flesh instead of the Spirit. This occurs because a believer who is living in disobedience is quenching the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19); therefore, he does not hear the leading of the Spirit. When a believer quenches the Spirit, he is left to the direction of his own flesh. This leads to worthless good works in the life of the Christian. Paul warns us in 1 Corinthians 3 that we might be saved but our “good works” might be found to be worthless when judged by God.

The Bible is full of examples of people who proclaim to be followers of God but choose to go their own way. King Saul comes to mind

for me. In 1 Samuel 15, God commands King Saul to totally destroy the Amalekites as punishment for their sin. This included destroying all of the livestock and plunder normally taken in war. The prophet Samuel visited Saul after the victory over the Amalekites. Samuel discovered that Saul had allowed the soldiers to keep the best of the livestock as plunder. Saul quickly began to make excuses for his disobedience, claiming that the livestock was kept to be sacrificed to the Lord. Samuel replied in verse 22, *“Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in **obeying** the voice of the Lord? To **obey** is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”* Saul chose to be led by his own will (spirit) instead of the Holy Spirit. The consequence of Saul’s disobedience was the loss of his kingdom and his fellowship with the Lord.

In contrast, Jesus sets the perfect example for the Christian. Jesus stated in John 5:19 *“I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.”* Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father. This obedience was maintained through continual submission of his will to the will of the Father. By living in obedience, Jesus remained in continual fellowship with the Father. In addition, he fully accomplished every purpose the Father had for him.

What is the value of obedience in the lives of Christians? First, it brings us into peace and fellowship with God. We cannot be at rest in our relationship with God while we are living in rebellion to his commands and calling. Second, we can know the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is difficult to discern the will of God while we are seeking our own will. Jesus prayed in the garden “not as I will, but as you will.” Third, it makes us available for works of righteousness. God cannot use us for His good works while we are living in unrighteousness. Fourth, it helps us to avoid the

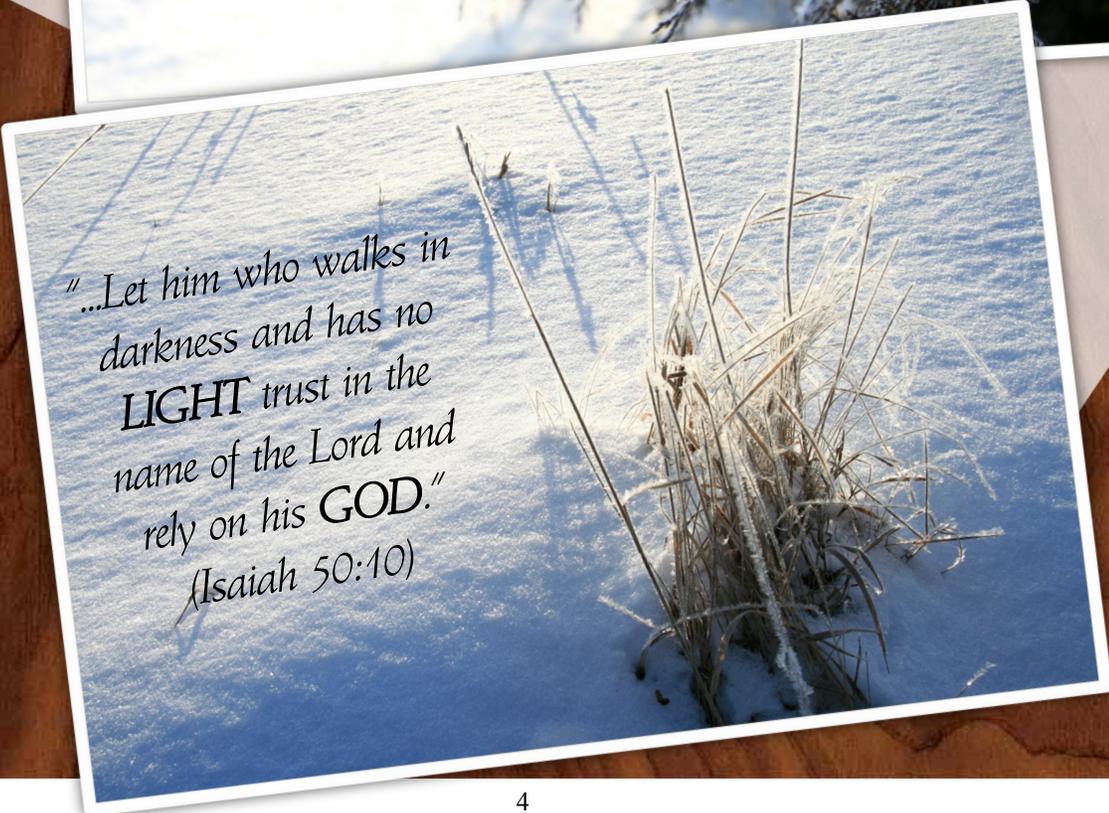
sorrows brought on by sin. Even in the lives of the Christians, sin has painful consequences that can be avoided through obedience. Lastly, it allows us to store up eternal rewards in addition to our salvation. Jesus and His apostles often spoke of eternal rewards that are earned in this life. Jesus encouraged us to store up treasures in heaven. God has more than salvation in store for those who live obedient and

“But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

(Matthew 6:20-21NIV)



“WHO among you fears the Lord and OBEYS the VOICE of His servant?...”



*“...Let him who walks in darkness and has no LIGHT trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his GOD.”
(Isaiah 50:10)*

*"How you are fallen from heaven,
O Day Star, son of Dawn!
How you are cut down to the ground,
you who laid the nations low!*

*You said in your heart,
I will ascend to heaven;
above the stars of God
I will set my throne on high;
I will sit on the mount of
assembly
in the far reaches of the north;
I will ascend above the heights of the
clouds;
I will make myself like the Most
High.'*

*But you are brought down to Sheol, to
the far reaches of the pit. Those who
see you will stare at you and ponder
over you:*

*'Is this the man who made the earth
tremble,
who shook kingdoms,
who made the world like a desert
and overthrew its cities,
who did not let his prisoners go
home?'*

(Isaiah 14:12-17)



I Have Come To Do Your Will, O God

By Nathan Warner

“You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’”

(Isaiah 14:13-14 ESV)

There is God’s will and there is “I will.” The “I will” always leads away from God’s will in our lives because it puts the focus on us and not on God. “I will” is an arrogant act of disobedience as we see in the first great disobedience – that of Lucifer, described above. To be disobedient requires us to know the difference between our will and the will of the one who commands us. If we know the will of God, and we are commanded to follow, then any subsequent action will either be in obedience or disobedience. There is no middle ground. If we act in our own will, we are always disobeying the will of the Father. If we follow His will, we obey God and “are saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8b) by the Grace of God through Jesus Christ.

In Isaiah, we see the King of Babylon’s conduct compared to Lucifer’s disobedience and rebellion against God when he determined to follow his will instead of God’s will. Lucifer wished to come out from under God’s authority and make himself like God. What a sad echo of this we have in Adam and Eve’s disobedience in the garden.

“The serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:4-5).

Adam and Eve were tempted to come out from under God’s authority and become like Him, so they could be under their own authority. Mankind constantly strives to determine its own course and to become its own authority, throwing off the authority of God to carry

out its will in disobedience to God. *“Like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me” (Hosea 6:7).* In Scripture, we see that disobedience never ends well.

In Adam and Eve’s case, their disobedience meant *“sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Romans 5:12).*

For all of Lucifer’s volition, his vows, and his determination, we read: *“How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!...you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit. Those who see you will stare at you and ponder over you: ‘Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world like a desert and overthrew its cities, who did not let his prisoners go home?’” (Isaiah 14:12, 15-17)*

The plague of disobedience enters everywhere, drawing mankind into vain rages against God’s authority. In Psalm 2, David describes the kings of the earth following the example of Lucifer and Adam by vainly plotting to throw God’s authority off from them. *“Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, ‘Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.’” (verse 1-3)*

God’s response is probably much the way it was to Lucifer’s arrogant disobedience: *“He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, ‘As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.’ I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession...’” (Psalm 2:4-8).*

Just as Lucifer, these kings cannot set themselves as rulers in Zion, for God has decreed His choice for King. As much as Lucifer willed to make himself a ruler like God, he

could not. Unlike Lucifer and all mankind, Jesus alone is crowned King on Zion – King of Kings and Lord of Lords. What is the difference?

Jesus repeatedly declared in action and in word that He was not serving His own will: *“the Son can do nothing of His own accord, but only what He sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise”* (John 5:19). Even knowing the terrible, humiliating death that was required of Him, if He obeyed, He told the Jews, *“When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing on My own authority, but speak just as the Father taught Me”* (John 8:28).

In Hebrews, we see that *“when Christ came into the world, He said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings You have not desired, but a body have You prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings You have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, **I have come to do Your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book’”*** (Hebrews 10:5-7).

This is the way that Jesus taught His disciples to live – to do nothing of our own accord or authority but everything as the Father teaches us (John 14:21-25) – to obey God’s will. Paul exhorts the Philippians to have the same mind as Christ, *“who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men”*** (Philippians 2:6-7). What a contrast we have in Jesus to all that has ever been or will be – for He alone is the Son of God! What an example to follow! What an amazing difference He makes! Through Him, we have the right to be called Children of God by His Will alone.

As believers, we are *“born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God”* (John 1:13). The will of the flesh is at enmity with God: *“For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please”* (Galatians 5:17). *“Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves*

*with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the **will of God”*** (1 Peter 4:1-2).

Even Believers are sometimes guilty of claiming to follow God’s will but actually follow their own will. In Psalm 101, David makes some pretty serious “I will” vows about how he will perform his office as King of Israel. Many of these vows should make Believers cringe, especially since they know what follows.

***“I will** sing of steadfast love and justice; to you, O LORD, I will make music.*

***I will** ponder the way that is blameless.*

Oh when will you come to me?

***I will** walk with integrity of heart within my house;*

***I will** not set before my eyes anything that is worthless.*

I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me.

A perverse heart shall be far from me;

***I will** know nothing of evil.*

*Whoever slanders his neighbor secretly **I will** destroy.*

Whoever has a haughty look and an arrogant heart

***I will** not endure.*

***I will** look with favor on the faithful in the land,*

that they may dwell with me;

he who walks in the way that is blameless shall minister to me.

No one who practices deceit shall dwell in my house;

no one who utters lies

shall continue before my eyes.

Morning by morning I will destroy

all the wicked in the land,

cutting off all the evildoers

from the city of the LORD.”

(Psalm 101)

What a testament to our sinful nature that David violated every single one of his core “I will” statements in his ungodly lust for Bath-

sheba in his own house, in his wicked adultery, in his deception, in his conspiracy to murder, and in that evil murder itself of such a faithful man as Uriah. David became the wicked in the land that he swore to destroy morning by morning – he became the evildoer he vowed to cut off. To read this Psalm with that in mind is heartbreaking.

This Psalm is not a hymn to the Lord but rather a hymn to David’s will. He is not praising God here, nor contemplating God’s will; instead, David is emphasizing what *he* will do as King, and though a good thing to aim for, he is making a law to follow unto himself. As we know from Scripture, the law brings death (1 Corinthians 15:56). Only grace can save us through our repentance – David understood this. In his Psalm of repentance, he cries:

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!...Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit...The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Psalm 51:1-2, 10-12, 17).

David was a man after God’s own heart. He was a man of repentance, who repented of the will of his flesh. This is the greatest lesson we can learn from him. To live our lives in constant repentance for our sinful, fleshly will – not to live our lives in self-righteousness that says we need not repent nor in a guilt that has no relief. Let us present our broken, contrite hearts to God that He may wash us from our iniquity. Let us put to death the disobedient “I will’s” that attempt to accomplish our salvation by our own hands and say, instead, with Jesus, “I have come to do **your will, O God.**”

Let us pray with David that the only “I will” we allow in our lives is “I will obey”: *“I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,’ and You forgave the iniquity of my*

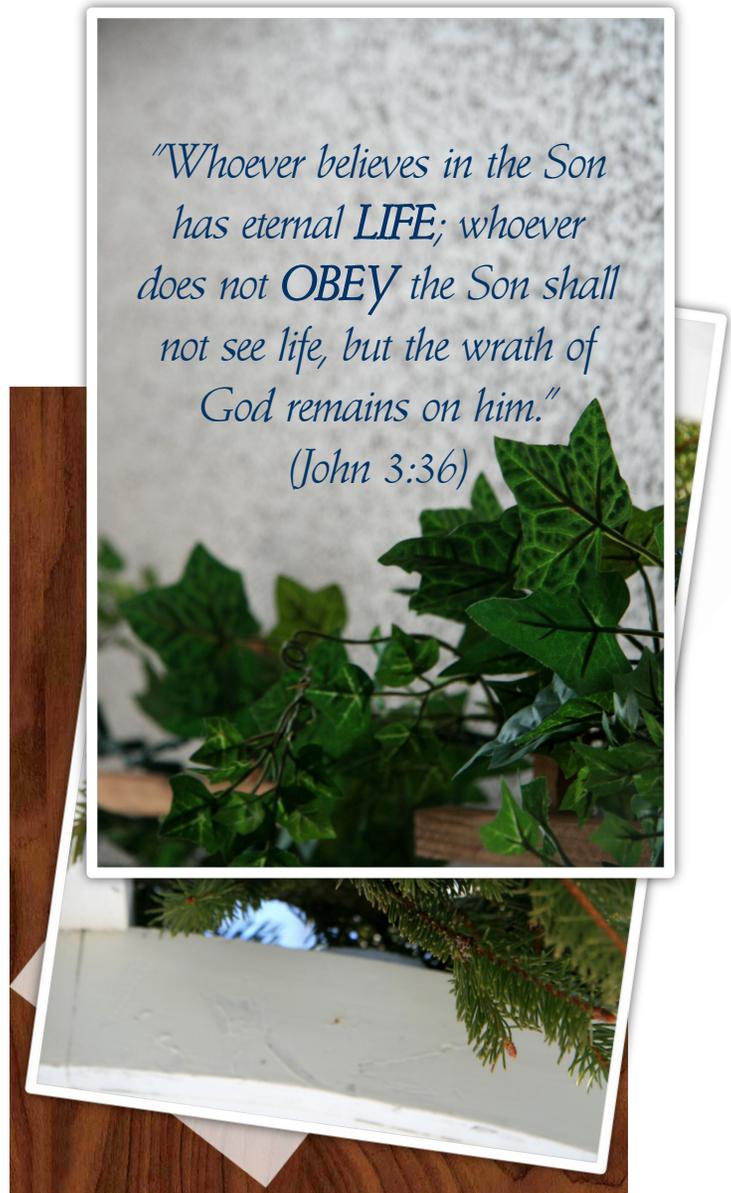
sin” (Psalm 32:5b).

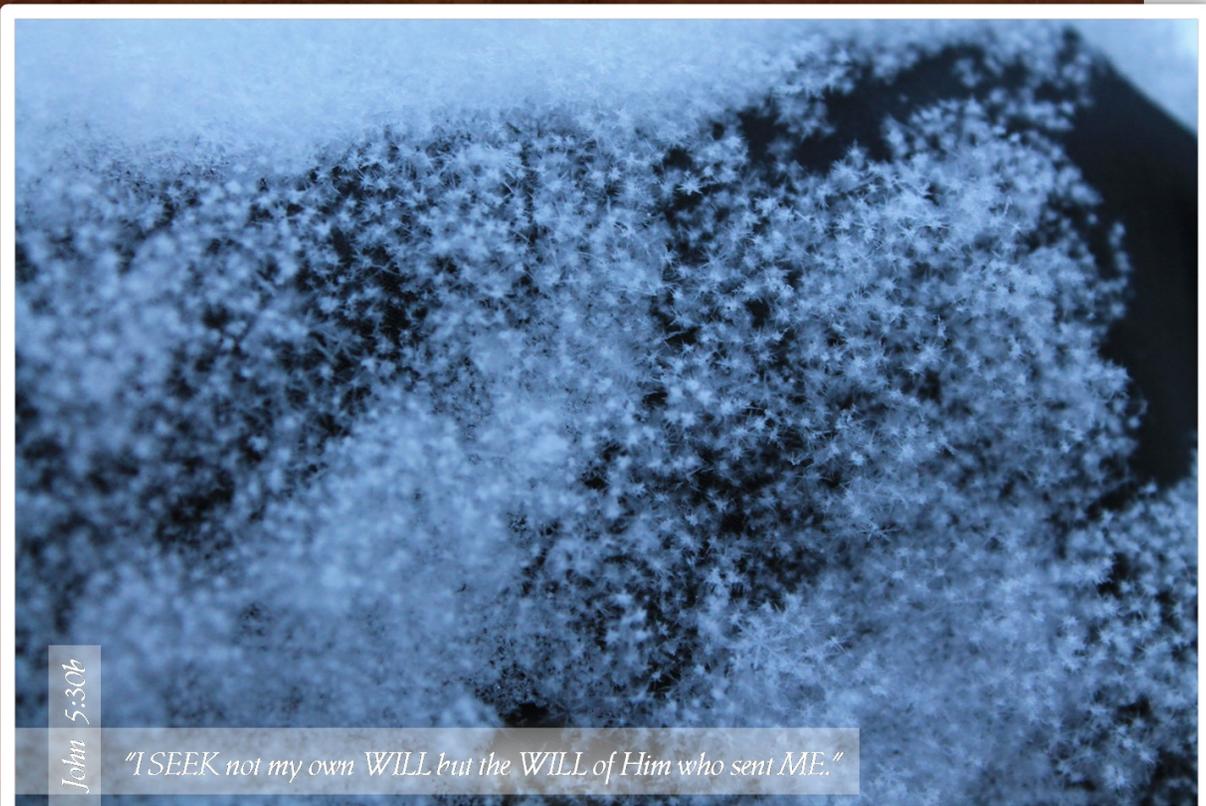
“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”

(Ephesians 2:4-8)

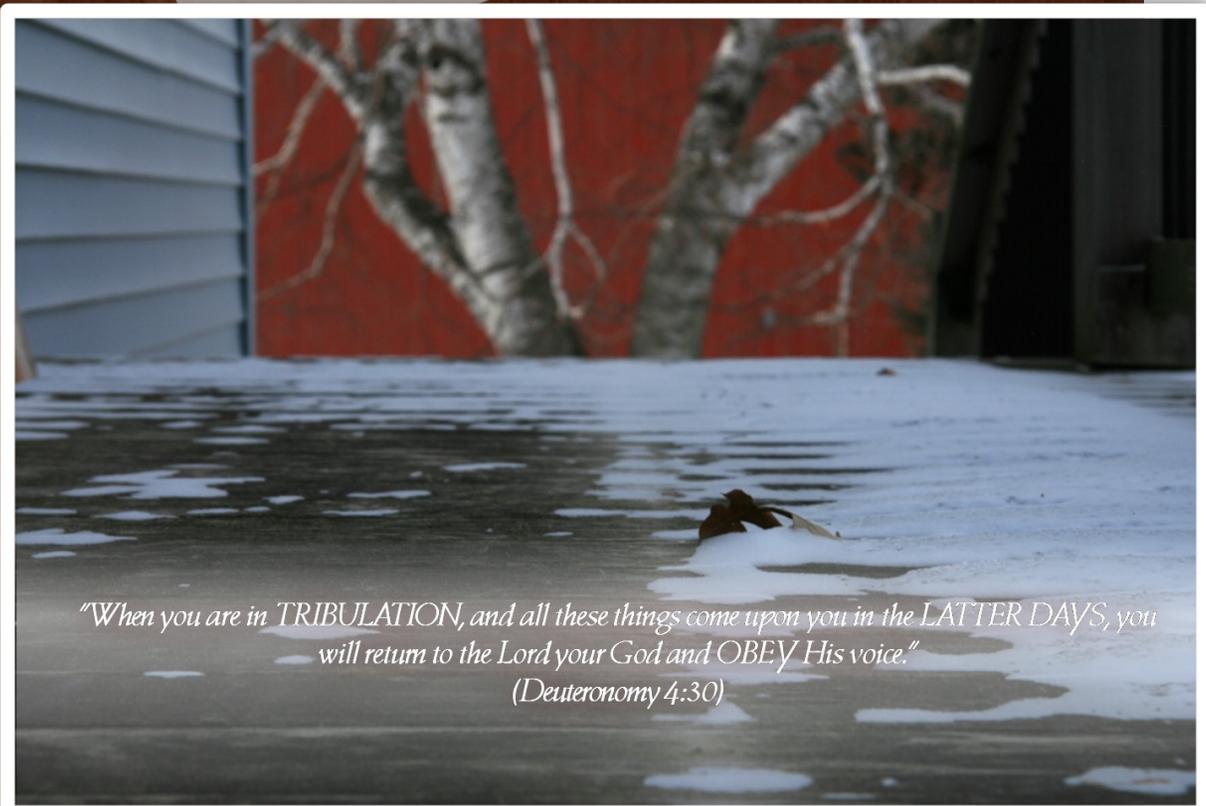
“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal LIFE; whoever does not OBEY the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

(John 3:36)





By Natalie Madsen



By Nathan Warner



By Lynn Warner

*"And HIS commandments
are NOT burdensome."
(1 John 5:3)*

Honoring Obedience

By Steve Hiebert

*"Honor your father and your mother so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you."
(Exodus 20:12 NIV)*

The story of Ruth reminds me a lot of the kind of loyalty and obedience that God wants to foster in each of us – especially in regards to our relationships with our parents. In Ruth 1:16 & 17, Ruth says to her mother-in-law, Naomi, *"Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."* Ruth accompanied Naomi to Bethlehem. Ruth volunteered to go to the fields to glean food for both Naomi and herself. She worked hard throughout the day and impressed the workers with her diligence. Boaz, who later became her kinsman-redeemer, told Ruth, *"I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband – how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge"* (Ruth 2:11-12).

Even though Naomi was Ruth's mother-in-law, she treated her as though she was her own mother. We see from Ruth an example of how she honored Naomi. Ruth stayed with Naomi in her time of need, she spent time with Naomi when no one else was around, she became Naomi's friend when her husband died and no one else was left, she served God with Naomi, and she provided food for Naomi when she could not provide for herself.

We can see more of Ruth's character in her great-grandson King David and his obedience

to the Lord. King David's heart was much like Ruth's heart. When we read David's Psalms, it seems that much of the love, honor, and obedience to God that defined Ruth's life was passed on to her great-grandson.



Disobedient Babel

By Nathan Warner

*"COME, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top **WILL REACH** into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the **FACE** of the whole earth."
(Genesis 11:4)*

By Natalie Madsen

*"What sort of MAN is this,
that even winds and sea
OBEY Him?"
(Matthew 8:27b)*



Psalm 34:12-13

Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many
good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips
from speaking lies.

By Maria Madsen

Prayer of Wanderers

*Standing alone in the meadows
Closing the closet doors
Walking against the setting sun
Sitting on bare room floors.*

*Counting snowflakes in the wind,
Angels in the night –
Breathing out the misty morning
Clearing air for light.*

*Silent saints are holding candles,
Light that bears the trouble,
Patron prophets carry pain
Beside the street of rubble.*

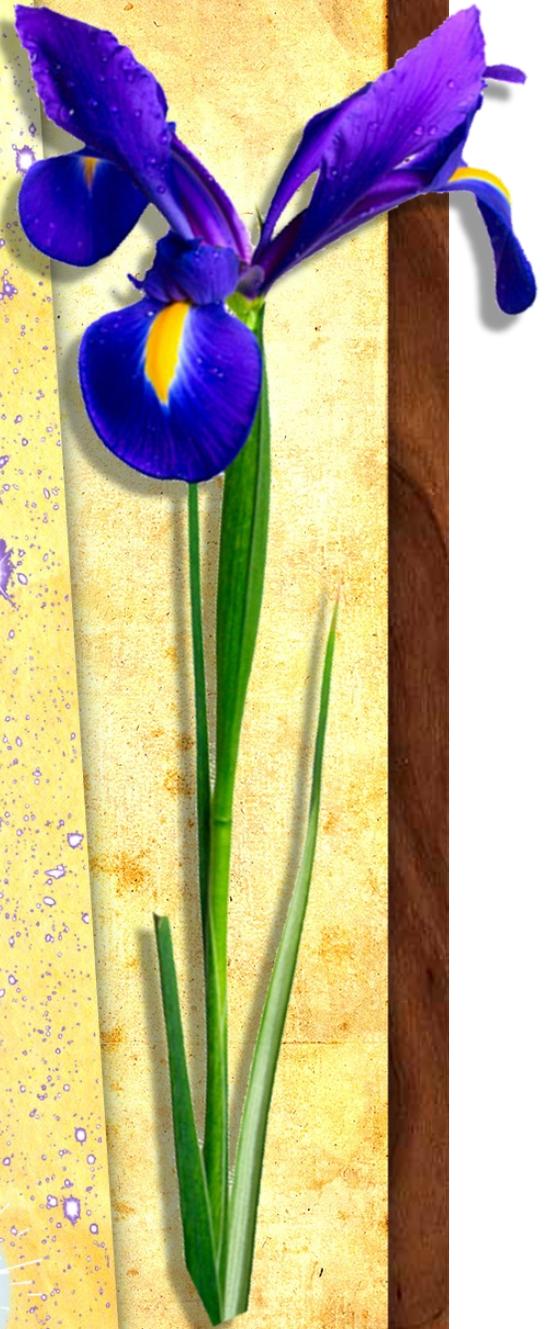
*Drinking green tea slowly down,
Every sip for some a care –
Tearing out the thoughtless weeds
In fields filled with blooming prayer.*

*Patient Pilgrims leaving town
Just to seek the Holy City,
Former priests who hung their veils
Now clear the stale house's pity.*

*Washing all the dirty dishes,
Sweeping dirt off all the floors,
Turning lights on all the rooms –
Opened windows, opened doors.*

*Every thought can be a prayer,
Or just enough to fill the space –
Every movement a hope, a praise
That brings us to His Holy place.*

By Nathan Warner

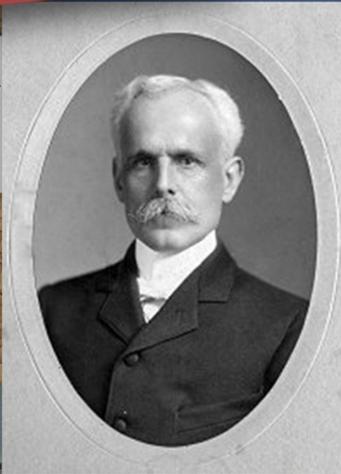
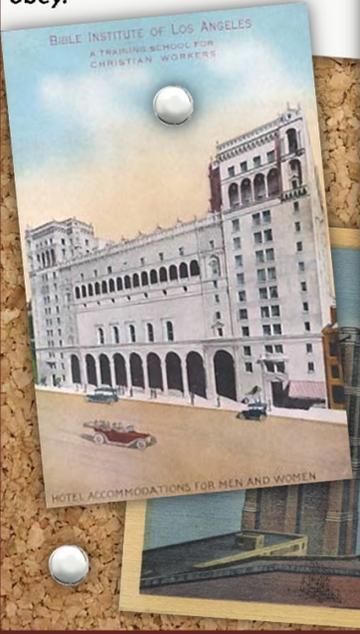


Sing A New Song

Words by John Henry Sammis

Music by Daniel Brink Towner

"...there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."



Trust and Obey TRUST & ASSURANCE
443

1 When we walk with the Lord in the light of his Word, what a
 2 Not a bur - den we bear, not a ser - row we share, but our
 3 But we nev - er can prove the de - lights of his love un - til
 4 Then in fel - low - ship sweet we will sit at his feet, or we'll

glo - ry he sheds on our way! While we do his good will, he a - bides with us
 toil he will rich - ly re - pay; not a grief nor a loss, not a frown nor a
 all on the al - tar we lay; for the fa - vor he shows and the joy he be -
 walk by his side in the way; what he says we will do, where he sends we will

Refrain
 still, and with all who will trust and o - bey.
 cross, but is blest if we trust and o - bey.
 stows are for them who will trust and o - bey. Trust and o - bey, for there's
 go - nev - er fear, on - ly trust and o - bey.

no oth - er way to be hap - py in Je - sus, but to trust and o - bey.

WORDS: John H. Sammis (1846-1919)
 MUSIC: Daniel B. Towner (1850-1919)
 TRUST AND OBEY
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Trust and Obey
 By Maggie Moller

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."
 (Proverbs 3:5-6 NIV)

"Trust and obey" sounds like an easy request from God, but it takes a lifetime to learn well. Trusting and obeying are contrary to our sinful human nature. To see a common example of this, we need to look no further than children interacting with their parents. Often, children don't see the need or the reason behind their parents' requests and demands, but the parents have their children's best interests

in mind, even when it means giving up pleasures of the moment. For example, a child may not see any long-term consequences to eating only cake and ice cream for dinner. Their parents, however, look beyond the moment and see the negative outcomes that decision would cause. The child may not understand the reason they have to eat broccoli instead of cake now, but down the road they will come to understand and value their parents' decisions. The same is true of our relationship with God as our Father. Often, we don't understand why things are happening to us the way they are, but God sees beyond the present circumstances. He sees how the present circumstances will cause us to grow, even though they are difficult now. To fully reap the benefits of the circumstances God places us in now, we need to trust that He knows best and obey His leading.

God has been working in my life teaching

me to trust and obey Him over the transition to living on my own since I moved to college at the end of August. It has been hard at times to understand why things work out the way they do, but I am not sorry I had to go through the little trials that have come my way. Through the “bumps in the road,” I have grown much closer to God, and I feel myself trusting Him more fully with my future. I do not mean that it is still not hard, but I know that God is trying to teach me lessons that will benefit me the rest of my life.

Let us remember, as the hymn instructs us in its chorus, to “trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”

Lyricist: John Henry Sammis

John Henry Sammis was born on July 6, 1846, in Brooklyn, New York. By the time he was just 23, he was a successful businessman in Logansport, Indiana. Despite his success in the business world, John felt a call to enter the ministry. He began to attend McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago and later Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati. In 1880, he was ordained as a Presbyterian minister. He served at various churches until moving to Los Angeles in 1901. There, he taught at the Bible Institute of Los Angeles where he remained for the rest of his career. He passed away in Los Angeles on June 12, 1919, at the age of 73. Throughout his career, he wrote lyrics for over 100 hymns, including the lyrics for “Trust and Obey.”

Composer: Daniel Brink Towner

Daniel Brink Towner was born on April 5, 1850, in Pennsylvania. He began studying music under his father’s instruction at an early age. Throughout his life, he served as a musical director for a variety of churches. According to Mr. Towner, this is how the hymn “Trust and Obey” came into existence:

[In 1886,] Mr. [Dwight] Moody was conducting a series of meetings in Brockton, Massachusetts, and I had the pleasure of singing for him there. One night a young man rose in a testimony and said, “I am not quite sure...but I am going to trust, and I am going to obey.” I just jotted that sentence down, and sent it with the little story to the Rev. J. H. Sammis, a Presbyterian minister. He wrote the hymn, and the tune was born.

Mr. Towner passed away on October 3, 1919, at the age of 69 in Longwood, Missouri, while leading music at an evangelistic meeting.

Works Consulted:
www.cyberhymnal.org
www.wikipedia.com



The Obedience of Faith

By Ginny Larsen

The Lord seeks our obedience. So what is obedience? It is important that we understand the obedience the Lord wants from us. Many seek to give *an* obedience that can never please God. It is the same *obedience of the flesh* of the Judaizers that Paul struggled against as he wrote to the Galatians. The *obedience of faith* is the only obedience God will accept from us. No obedience of our flesh will do.

We cannot obey the truth without faith in the finished work of Christ. Faith and obedience in Christ are practically synonymous. Our obedience is to **believe into Him** and trust Him to be our only salvation, sanctification, righteousness, and life every day. When we try to work for our salvation (whether to obtain it or keep it) by outward works and observances, even what appears to be obedience to the law, we disobey God, because we do not walk by faith in Him – rather, we walk by faith in our own righteousness.

The apostles brought the gospel message – the **obedience of faith in Christ**, “*through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the **obedience of faith** for the sake of his name among all the nations*” (Romans 1:5).

“*Now to Him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the **obedience of faith***” (Romans 16:25-26), “*and to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief*” (Hebrews 3:18-19).

Those walking according to outward religious works, rituals, and laws are walking *according to the flesh* and not the Spirit. They never enter into His rest because of their

unbelief – the rest of faith in the finished work of Christ and His sufficiency as their only righteousness. They believe they must still somehow have a part in producing their own righteousness before God. In thinking they are obeying God by keeping certain forms, rules, etc., they are actually walking in disobedience, trusting in their own righteousness.

“***But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him***” (Hebrews 11:6).

Those in the (*religious*) flesh seek to please God by their service. But if they are not walking in faith in His inner workings in and through them, confident in His righteousness imputed to them, it is impossible for them to please God. They are still in the flesh. “As to man, the law and the ordinances were only bondage. They aimed at bridling the will without its being changed” (J.N. Darby on Galatians 4:1-31). “*But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?*” (Galatians 4:9) Let’s look at the definitions of some of these words:

Weak – powerless to justify: in contrast to the justifying power of faith (Galatians 3:24; compare Hebrews 7:18).

Beggarly – contrasted with the riches of the inheritance of believers in Christ (Ephesians 1:18). The state of the child (Galatians 4:1) is weak, as not having attained manhood; beggarly, as not having attained the inheritance.

Elements – it is as if a schoolmaster should go back to learning the A, B, C’S [Bengel].

Again – there are two Greek words in the original. Ye desire again, beginning afresh, to be in bondage. Though the Galatians, as Gentiles, had never been under the Mosaic yoke, yet they had been under the elements of the world (Galatians 4:3): the common designation for the Jewish and Gentile sys-

tems alike, in contrast to the Gospel (however superior the Jewish was to the Gentile). Both systems consisted in outward worship and cleaved to sensible forms. Both were in bondage to the elements of sense, as though these could give the justification and sanctification which the inner and spiritual power of God alone could bestow (Jamieson, Faucett, and Brown Commentary on Galatians 4:9).

This is today what many ministers of the gospel seek to teach their congregation – to bridle the will by striving to keep the law, rather than walking by faith in the power of His righteousness and the indwelling Spirit, Who brings to us the life and righteousness of Christ Himself in our hearts. They draw their congregations back to the beggarly elements of living the Christian life by works of law, rather than an obedience of faith. It is only the righteousness of Christ Himself that will ever be pleasing to God, and it is only our yielding to that righteousness by faith in Him that will be considered obedience to Him.

May the Lord deal completely with our religious flesh and expose it! May He reveal to us a righteousness of faith and obedience to that righteousness by faith. May we embrace the same obedience to righteousness (the righteousness of Christ) that Paul himself did:

“For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh – though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own

that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (Philippians 3:3-9).



His Flock Among the Lilies

By Lynn Warner

“My beloved is mine, and I am his; He pastures his flock among the lilies.”
(Song of Solomon 2:16 NASB)

Relationship and identity reveal who we belong to and who we really are. If our relationship is built on Christ and we abide with Him then we “...are already clean because of the word which I (Jesus) have spoken to you” (John 15:3) and “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love” (John 15:10a). However, if our relationships are with darkness and lies, we will be fragmented and numb, and stumble along our way. If we follow Jesus he has said, “...I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life” (John 8:12). We will be more whole and “lifened” if we follow Jesus, for He is Eternal Life. In John 17:3, He defines Eternal Life: “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

Life in the Spirit is “knowing” – it is relational. To have a loving relationship, we have a sense of belonging – a connection, and we feel like we are “seen” (accepted and welcomed). We are in God’s household and eat at His table. Psalm 23 gives us a lovely picture of this: “The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake” (Psalm 23:1-3). Jesus described Himself as the Good Shepherd in John 10, and what do the sheep do? They follow Him, because they know His voice: “When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers” (John 10:4-5).

A “stranger” represents great danger in this

passage. In fact, by the ninth verse, we recognize the stranger which Jesus describes is a **thief**. “I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The **thief** comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep” (John 10:9-11).

Like Psalm 23, the Good Shepherd takes great care of His sheep, and nourishes and cherishes them with life-giving food and water (both physical and spiritual). He converts their souls and leads them in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. The sheep hear Him and heed Him; they know His voice and follow Him. Not only that, but they also flee from the voice of strangers who come to steal, kill, and destroy with darkness and lies.

The Good Shepherd protects His sheep and even lays down His life for them. Jesus emphatically states His protection in John 10:27-28: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.” Jesus knows when we need help – He knows our true needs before we do and Jesus is with us providing life, truth and the way. Psalm 23:5 describes that God prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies. Jesus allows us to eat at His table in His household, and are invited into His presence.

Yet, we may shrink back in distrust, especially when we go through trials, suffering and start doubting. He is always asking us if we hear and believe in the Gospel. The Gospel is the Good News that shows us the way of “real life”. When we sin God leads us to repentance – then when we repent of our wandering and distrustful ways, we are met with welcoming love and acceptance by our Shepherd. He gives us strength and power to trust Him through our many sufferings. Can we say like Job, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him”? (Job 13:15). We can only trust God through our Belief in Jesus, as Jesus explained in John 6:29: “...This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.” This

statement does not simply mean our initial belief when we first come to Christ, but a continual belief that works throughout our lives.

God feeds us His grace, as we see in Hebrews, where we are warned: *“Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited”* (Hebrews 13:9). We who live by Faith in Jesus Christ do not find life in the law of commandments or penalties but in the Gospel of Grace, mercy, and Eternal life. He Himself works in us, as our Great Shepherd, to do his will: *“Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever.*

Amen” (Hebrews 13:20-21). We are instructed to obey and work out our salvation as we see in Philippians 2:12: *“So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”* In the very next verse (13), we see how to obey: *“for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”* We sheep are weak and don’t even know how to pray as we should as we see in Romans 8:26-27: *“In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”*

As our identity and relationship in Christ reveals who we belong to and who we truly are, our new nature is also revealed, not only to others, but to us also. We also see our fleshly nature and are scandal-

ized by it. Our weaknesses offend us. The weaknesses and the fleshly natures of our Brethren in Christ may also offend us. But Jesus sees it all, all of our weak sheepish brokenness, foolishness, and wanderings. He will even leave the flock to fetch us back if we wander too far astray (Jesus told this parable in Luke 15:3-7). As God empowers us, we must remember to approach all things (in Him) like our Heavenly Shepherd.

I have pondered Hosea 14:4a for many years: *“I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely.”* Both the parable of the Lost Sheep and the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) seem to illustrate that our backsliding, apostasy, and wandering can only be healed by God’s freely given love. Penalties and punishments emphasize the problem of sin, but they do not heal us or keep us in the love of God. Only through the Gospel can we truly say, *“My beloved is mine, and I am His”* (Song of Solomon 2:16a) *“and His banner over me is love”* (Song of Solomon 2:4b). Jesus is our Good Shepherd who calls, leads, feeds, keeps, and protects us. *“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”* (Romans 15:13).

March Newsletter Theme—Authority

Submission Deadline: March 3

Publish Date: March 10

Theme: Authority, Teaching as one with authority (Matthew 7:29), The Centurion – “For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it” (Matthew 8:9), authority to forgive sins (Matthew 9:6), Biblical view of authority – servant leadership (Matthew 20:25-28), all authority on heaven and on earth given to Jesus (Matthew 28:18), there is no authority, except from God (Romans 13:1), etc...