

## The Nature Of The Church (1)

—William Kelly

### *Introduction*

*William Kelly (1820-1906), Biblical scholar and expositor, was brought up in the Anglican Church. He graduated from Trinity College, Dublin University, obtaining the highest honours in classics, and lived in England for the remainder of his life. Soon after his graduation, in his early twenties, he came to the Biblical convictions that he later expressed in the following article.*

*In the nineteenth century, England's religious community was divided into two main streams, the national Church (i.e., the Church of England), and the dissenting Churches (i.e., Baptist, Methodist, etc.). The national church claimed jurisdiction over everybody, and admitted both believers and unbelievers. Its ecclesiastical appointment was down: archbishop to bishop, bishop to minister. The dissenting churches admitted only those believers who agreed with their particular views. Among them, ecclesiastical appointment was up: members to minister or elders; members, elders, and ministers to president.*

*In this article, William Kelly emphasizes two principles: the one body, and the one Spirit. The Church, the body of Christ, consists of all true believers (in contrast to the dissenting churches), and only true believers (in contrast to the national church). Appointment in the Church is not by men, nor of men, but by the Holy Spirit. He is the One who distributes the gifts, leads in the assembly, and sets up leaders and elders. Neither downward appointment from bishops and archbishops (based on the myth of apostolic succession), nor upward election (based on the political idea of democratic majority) are Scriptural.*

*In his best style, William Kelly forcefully argues from God's Word that these two principles, one body and one Spirit, are sufficient for us today.*

### *One Body and One Spirit*

The will of God is that His Church should be one, not in spirit merely, but also in an embodied form, so as to exhibit its unity in each place, and its unity throughout the world (Jn. 11:52; 17:11,21; Acts 2:11; Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 2:4; 1 Tim. 3:15). This He will accomplish in perfection at the coming of Christ (Jn. 17:21,23; Eph. 5:27; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 19:7; 21:9). Meantime it is incumbent on all believers to seek this holy and manifested union, and to put away everything that hinders it. We may be weak in meeting our corporate responsibility, as we are in answering our individual calling to holiness. Still in both respects, and in spite of all difficulties, our duty remains clear, paramount, and inevitable. But this is not by the mass of Christians maintained as a sacred, irreversible point of doctrine and practice. Popery owns it, but after a carnal manner.

All the Protestant national bodies have asserted, and acted on, the assumed title to accommodate their modes of government, rites, ceremonies, etc., according to the will of their rulers, whether they be within or without the so-called churches. These, consequently, vary in different ages and countries. The dissenting bodies, again, have been formed, generally speaking, either according to the self-devised plan of some individual mind, sometimes without even the idea of the Church of God occurring to its founders; or according to partial views of Scripture truth, which scatter the faithful instead of uniting them.

The chief error of nationalism, in this or in any other country, is the latitudinarian opening of the door to receive into the most solemn acts of worship and Christian fellowship the whole population (i.e. in principle) irrespective of looking for the gift of the Spirit. That of dissent, on the contrary, is the sectarian closing of the door on real Christians who cannot utter the Shibboleth (Jud. 12:6) of the party; and thus many brethren are excluded. In a word, the characteristic evil of the former is, that they do treat as Christians many who are known not to be such at all. The one system makes the limits broader, the other narrower than God's limits. In either way the proper Scriptural idea of the Church is practically destroyed: dissent virtually affirming that it is not the one body, but many; while nationalism virtually denies that it is the body of Christ. God would have His children not to be separate, but to gather together to the Name of Jesus. Now this is evidently set aside when you separate any who ought to be united (i.e. all believed on proper ground to be true Christians), or when you associate as brethren in Christ with any who ought to be separate (i.e. those who are plainly of this world, or who, if they profess Christ, deny Him in evil doctrines or works).

It may be replied perhaps, that though this was, beyond all legitimate question, the order of the Holy Spirit in the early days of the Church, times and circumstances are altered now. Gifts of healing, working of miracles, diversities of tongues,

no longer exist as they once did. All this is freely admitted. But we ask, Is there such a body as the Church<sup>1</sup> any longer on the earth? If there be, the Spirit of God is Himself personally on earth as truly, though not so manifestly, as at the commencement; for He it is who is the formative agent and guide of the Church. It was He that baptized Jews and Gentiles into one body. It was He that was to abide forever. The Church, properly so called, began then as an accomplished fact (see Acts 1:5, and 1 Cor. 12:13); for one speaks not of the hidden purpose of God. Pentecost first saw her dowered with the promise of the Father.

Believers of course there had been before, as we know, from Abel downwards; but, though quickened of the Spirit, they were not baptized of Him, they had not Him dwelling in them, like the saints after Pentecost. This was the precious privilege, for which it was expedient that Christ should go away: "For if I go not away, the Comforter (or Advocate) will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (Jn. 16:7). It could not be till Jesus was glorified (Jn. 7:39). But when sent down from heaven, the Spirit of truth was to be in them forever. "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it sees Him not, neither knows Him: but ye know Him; for He dwells with you, and shall be in you" (Jn. 14:16-17).

It is the owning, then, of the Holy Ghost as Christ's Vicar, as the really present, sole, and sufficient Paraclete or Advocate in the Church during our Lord's absence, which is our special responsibility, and ought to be a leading feature in our Christian testimony.

This cardinal truth of the presence of the Holy Spirit in and with the Church has these two immensely important consequences:

1. It is not by baptism, infant or adult;<sup>2</sup> it is not by the adoption of this or that article or creed; it is "by one Spirit," the Holy Spirit of God, "we are all" (i.e., all of us believers) "baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13). It is, if one may be allowed so to say reverently, the highest qualification which God can impart — the baptizing by the Holy Spirit Himself of the blood-washed believer — which introduces into the one body, the body of Christ. But this is the privilege of all true Christians. Nothing therefore short of a platform such as in principle to admit all Christians, and Christians only, can satisfy faith, because nothing short of this satisfies the Spirit of God. When it is said, "Christians only," it is meant, so far as man guided by the Word and Spirit of God can discern. If they are hypocrites, they will be made manifest in His own good time.

2. After the apostle has discussed the confession of the Lordship of Jesus by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3), which is the foundation of everything here, he shows that there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit; diversities of services, but the same Lord; and diversities of operations, but the same God working all in all. Then in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, he enters into the detail of these manifestations of the Spirit. It is given to each for common profit; whether the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, etc.: different manifestations, "but all these works that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will." Now, while it is confessed that some or many of the exterior gifts are no more found, it must be here affirmed that this does not in the smallest degree negate the truth that the Spirit Himself does abide. But if He abides, has He resigned His functions? If even in these days, when pride cannot cloak the spiritual declension it so

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<sup>1</sup> *When we speak of the ruin of the Church, it is not meant that the Church does not exist upon the earth. On the contrary, if it did not exist upon the earth, it could not be in any such condition. The phrase is similar to that which is applied to a man of broken fortune. Men say, "He is a ruined man." Of course it is understood that the man exists. So it is with the present state of the Church. That state doubtless occasions difficulties; for many things are not as they ought to be, nor as they once were. But the Word and Spirit of God are for eternal service, and suffice for every emergency. "If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness" (Mt. 6:22). The humble and obedient heart will never lack divine guidance.*

<sup>2</sup> *It is not denied that baptism was the outward sign or manifestation of a confessor of Christ. Only it is important to remember that a believer was not baptized as a member of any particular assembly. Recognized by baptism as a confessor of Christ, one naturally sought communion where one happened to be, if there was an assembly there; and the Lord's supper was the constantly-recurring, outward pledge and symbol of union and communion. "For we, being many, are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17). It may be added here, that those who preached in no way regarded baptism or the Lord's supper as rites to be administered necessarily by them. Thus Peter commanded Cornelius and his friends to be baptised in the name of the Lord (Acts 10:48); and Paul writes, "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 1:17). He says this markedly as to the Corinthians, and many of them, we know, believed and were baptized (Acts 18:8); so that other brethren must have acted in this service. As to the Lord's supper, the same thing is as plain, if not more so. In fact the idea of an authorized person to break the bread does not occur, not anything that I know which gives a colour to it, in the New Testament. See Acts 20:7, and also 1 Cor. 11, where if under any circumstances, there might have seemed the need of some restraint; for the Corinthians had turned the table to fleshly licence. But while the Spirit reproveth the evil, and presses the holy and solemn character of the feast, He leaves the manner of its celebration as unrestricted as ever. It is the saints as a body who are in His view, and not a privileged class who claim the administration as their right. Circumstances apart, as for the example in the case of a novice, any brother was competent to baptize or to break the bread.*

vainly strives to deny, if still one Christian has "the word of wisdom," and another has "the word of knowledge," is it from the Spirit of God, or from some other spirit? "What man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knows no man, but the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:11). Can it be mere man's wisdom now? or is there such a thing as the teaching of the Holy Spirit?

*To be cont'd.*

## **Deuteronomy** — The Book of Obedience

—*W. D. Hayhoe*

### *Introduction*

This is one of the least read and least preached upon books of the Bible. The name itself is enough to scare some readers! It sounds like Deuterium, the substance used to control nuclear fission in reactors. Both words mean second: Deuterium, second isotope of the element Hydrogen; and Deuteronomy, the second giving of the Law of Moses. This title is misleading, however, for Deuteronomy is not just a repeat of the Law given in Exodus and Leviticus, as some critics claim, but it is a special warning given to God's people at the border of the land of Canaan. This book contains a crucial message to God's people when they were on the threshold of entering into the land of God's promises.

### *Why did the Lord quote from Deuteronomy?*

For many years I stayed away from Deuteronomy, thinking it to be a thirty-four-chapter final scolding by Moses to Israel for their failure as God's people. And this would surely have little application to Christians today who are under God's grace! However, I knew that there must be something very important in its message. For did not the Lord Himself quote from Deuteronomy all three times to answer Satan's temptations in the wilderness? (Mt. 4; Lk. 4).

*"You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only" (Mt. 4:10, Dt. 6:13).*

*"You shall not tempt the Lord your God" (Mt. 4:7, Dt. 6:16).*

*"Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Mt. 4:4, Dt. 8:3).*

If Deuteronomy is not just a repeat of Exodus and Leviticus, what is its distinctive message? This last book of Moses is a simple call for *unconditional obedience* when there is great failure among God's people. Coming at the conclusion of Israel's forty years of wandering through the wilderness, it presupposes failure and ruin among God's people, and gives as a remedy, not pretensions or claims of great power, but simple obedience and faithfulness to God's commandments:

*"Then Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, 'Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully' (Dt. 5:1).*

Therefore it was perfectly appropriate, as of course we would assume, for the Lord to quote from this book in answer to the devil's tempting Him to be unfaithful. Were not the people at the time of the Lord in great failure? They had just come to John the Baptist in great multitudes to confess it (Mt. 3; Lk. 3). Thus the Lord takes the position of a godly, faithful Jew in the midst of an unfaithful nation and quotes from the Book of Deuteronomy, precisely their resource for such a day of failure.

### *Does Deuteronomy apply to believers today?*

Yes, indeed, for while its first application is to the Jew, our standing in grace does not set aside obedience, but on the contrary gives it an even higher motive than before. But this very theme — God's grace renewing the people after failure, and bringing them back to obedience — is plainly written in Deuteronomy itself:

*"The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples... but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand... Therefore, you shall keep the commandments and the statutes and the judgments which I am commanding you today, to do them" (Dt. 7:7-11).*

Besides this great theme, the book is full of examples and principles which the apostle Paul, apostle to the Gentiles, does not hesitate to apply to us today, in his ten or more direct references to this book:

1. Romans 2:29 Deuteronomy 10:16
2. Romans 10:6-8 Deuteronomy 30:11-14
3. 1 Corinthians 9:9 Deuteronomy 25:4
4. Galatians 3:10 Deuteronomy 27:26
5. Galatians 3:13 Deuteronomy 21:23
6. Ephesians 6:3 Deuteronomy 5:16
7. 1 Timothy 5:18 Deuteronomy 25:4
8. 1 Timothy 5:19 Deuteronomy 19:15
9. Hebrews 12:25 Deuteronomy 30:17
10. Hebrews 12:29 Deuteronomy 4:24

Peter and Stephen also quote directly from this book:

1. Acts 3:22-23 Deuteronomy 18:15-19
2. Acts 7:37 Deuteronomy 18:18
3. 1 Peter 2:9-10 Deuteronomy 4:20; 7:6; 14:2; 26:18-19

One writer claims to have found more than eighty references to Deuteronomy in the New Testament. (No doubt my neglect of this book for many years was my loss!)

Here are some interesting instructions found in Deuteronomy. For those who are building a house with a walkout roof, what must always be done? For those engaged in warfare, which trees should not be cut down? And for those getting married, what restrictions are placed on the husband during the first year of marriage? Of course, many of the regulations found in the books of Moses do not apply to us as New Testament believers. But we can always learn something from them, in way of example, or principle, or even contrast.

#### *What does Deuteronomy teach about Worship?*

The importance of obedience is especially emphasized in the first section, chapters 1-11. The second section, chapters 12-29, gives a series of statutes related to their community life in the land that they were entering. The focus of this life was to be "the place which the Lord chose for His name to dwell." No less than 20 times in this section, does it emphasize this centre of worship (See Dt. 12:5,11,14,18,21,26; 14:23-25; 16:2,6,7,11,15,16; 17:8,10; 18:6; 26:2). Of course we know that today there is no geographical place, as the Lord clearly taught the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:20 — "Neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem"). Therefore no group can claim to be the place! But, on the other hand, there is one truth, one basis of worship, one body, one Head, and one Spirit, as the Lord also taught the woman that day. This is the "one place" in the New Testament, i.e. one spiritual basis of gathering and one way of worship as expounded in Paul's Epistles, especially Corinthians and Ephesians. The Lord had said:

*"When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth" (Jn. 16:13).*

Today, it is important to re-emphasize this truth — that the Lord is the One who determines how we should worship Him, just as with His earthly people, Israel. Too many people feel that they can worship God any way they like. When giving His disciples instructions about how to find the place where He would celebrate the passover with them (Lk. 22:7-12), the Lord gave two signs, "a man [typifying the Spirit] carrying a pitcher of water [typifying the Word]." These two guide us in the way we should collectively worship God. "Those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and truth" (Jn. 4:24).

The final section of the book, chapters 30-34, gives us the last words of Moses, including his song, and his blessing of the twelve tribes. In his song, he points out that there is no one to turn to but "our Rock." His blessing of the twelve tribes contrasts with Jacob's blessing at the end of the first book of the Pentateuch. This shows us that there is absolutely no needless repetition in Deuteronomy of things that also appear in the other four books of Moses, but that everything occurs in each book according to its own theme and perspective — just as with the four Gospels, with which we are more familiar.

#### *Outline of Deuteronomy*

- 1-11    *REVIEW*        — Historical outline of the wanderings of Israel in the desert, and renewal of the law and the covenant with the new generation.
- 12-29   *PREVIEW*       — Statutes on the importance of the place where the Lord would choose to put His name to dwell.
- 30-34   *AU REVOIR*      — Curses and blessings, and last words of Moses, including his Song and blessings of the twelve tribes, death and burial.

*The End*

## The Seven Pillars Of Wisdom's House (2) — Divine Mysteries

—T. L. Mather



*So far we looked at the first three mysteries or pillars (See the diagram). Now we will look at three more.*

### *The Mystery of Christ*

The same Paul who tells us that *all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge* are hidden in the mystery of God, also tells us about the *riches of the glory* of another mystery, called the *mystery of Christ*. Clearly, the riches of the mystery of Christ are heavenly, because the riches are linked up to the glory. That is to be expected, since Christ has returned to glory without His earthly kingdom. God compensates Him for this loss by giving Him the Church. The Church is predominantly Gentile because of Israel's partial blindness. To the Gentiles, who had been *without hope* and God in the world, this mystery, Christ in the Gentiles, *the hope of glory*, was to be preached. The mystery of Christ, in other words, the mystery of the King, is so called because the King is hidden in heaven. He is exiled, as it were, from His earthly kingdom, but only for a while. His return has become a living hope for believing Gentiles.

The mystery of Christ involves two things. First, its revelation, for God had hidden it. Secondly, once revealed, its being made known to the nations by the preaching of the gospel. The gospel is itself a mystery, i.e. it is a mystery within the mystery of Christ. Let us explore these two considerations.

#### *a. The Revelation of the Hidden Mystery of Christ*

In Colossians 1:26-27, Paul tells us that God had hidden the mystery of Christ, but would now make it known, "The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations. To whom God would make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is Christ in you the hope of glory." Then in Ephesians 3:3-6, Paul tells us

that the mystery of Christ was revealed to him, and he understood it, "How that by revelation He made known to me the mystery, as I wrote a little before in few words, whereby when you read you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ." In Colossians 1:23, Paul exhorts the believers not to be "moved away from the hope of the gospel, which you have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven, whereof I Paul am made a minister." Paul received this truth from God. He was no ordinary minister of the gospel, but was directly accountable to God to preach His message. He emphasized this in 1 Corinthians 16: "For necessity is laid on me, yes woe to me if I preach not the gospel."

#### *b. The Mystery of the Gospel*

In Romans 16:25, Paul writes about the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery. Then in Colossians 4:3 he asks for prayer, "That God would open to us a door of utterance to speak the mystery of the gospel, for which I am also in bonds." This tells us that the mystery which has now been revealed is to be made known to the nations. But why should Paul be imprisoned for proclaiming such a blessed message as the gospel of the glory of the blessed God?

The reason is that the preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who perish, as Paul informs the Corinthians at the opening of his first letter to them. Paul's reception by the philosophers of Athens is the historical proof of what he told the Corinthians, "And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, and others said we will hear you again about this matter" (Acts 17:32). These wisest of men considered Paul's message absolute foolishness. Some mocked it openly. The more polite distanced themselves from it. Regardless of the form rejection of the gospel may take, God has made foolish the wisdom of this world. Paul sums the matter up in 1 Corinthians 1:21, "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, [i.e., by the investigations of their philosophers] it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe."

#### *The two Great Heavenly Mysteries*

As we have seen, God's focus has shifted from earth to heaven, because that is where Christ is now. Because He is *great*, two *great* new heavenly mysteries will now occupy our attention. Scripture uses adjectives sparingly, and when it tells us that these mysteries are *great* it wants us to pay close attention to them. Between the two great mysteries is a parenthetical mystery which Paul introduces with the words, "Behold I tell you a mystery."

#### *a. The Great Mystery of Godliness*

The great mystery of godliness is given us in 1 Timothy 3:16: "And without controversy *great* is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached to the Gentiles, believed on in the world, *received up into glory*." The mystery of godliness is from the birth of Christ to His ascension to glory, omitting His death.<sup>3</sup> No Jew would have believed that Messiah's life would have taken this character. This mystery ends with Christ received up into glory, just as Mark 16:19 says, "He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God." The reason the mystery of godliness ends with Messiah on high is that only then could the Holy Spirit be sent down to form the Church. This happened on the Day of Pentecost, and united Christ in glory with His body, the Church on earth. This unity is the subject of another mystery, that of Christ and the Church. But before we touch on that mystery we must look at the question of death, the great barrier to actual union with Christ at the present time.

#### *b. A Parenthetical Mystery*

The parenthetical mystery we are now taking a look at must come to pass before we too are received up into glory. Paul tells us in Romans 8:38-39 that death cannot separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. But it is not until he opens up the subject of death and resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 that we learn how death is swallowed up in victory. We who have borne the image of the earthy shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Nothing less will do. Our present bodies of humiliation, which are subject to death, are not consonant with the greatness of God's salvation. "For in this we groan," Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:2, "earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven." He also tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:50 that it is impossible to enter the glory of God in our present bodies, "Now this I say brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither does corruption inherit incorruption."

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<sup>3</sup> *The death of Christ is omitted from this passage because it was not a mystery. Numerous passages in the Old Testament predicted it — c.f. Ps. 22; Isa. 53; etc.*

It is at this juncture that Paul introduces his parenthetical mystery, which falls between Christ's being received up into glory and the Church being received up into glory. He says, "Behold I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump. For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." This mystery rounds out the details of how the Lord is the Saviour of the body. He will clothe us with glorified bodies, like His own body of glory. To crown it all, He has promised in John 14:3 to receive us to Himself. When Christ was received up into glory it was without His bride, when we are received up into glory He will have His bride, and we will dwell together.

### *c. The Great Mystery of the Union of Christ and the Church*

Speakers at Christian weddings often choose Ephesians 5:22-32 as their text. It is suitable because here Paul brings out the relationship in affection God expects between the bride and the bridegroom which is analogous to that between Christ and the Church. This helps a speaker move from the natural to the spiritual, exhorting the newly married couple in the Lord. So skilfully does Paul handle his subject that his words are less an analogy than an interwoven topic, the real meaning of which is hidden until the end. Then he informs us, "This is *a great mystery*, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church." This mystery, the union of Christ and the Church, is true to faith now. It will become a physical reality when the dead in Christ are raised and the bodies of the living saints are changed. Then we will both be received up into glory in bodies of power to dwell with the Lamb forever.

It is the mind of God that Christ should present the Church to Himself, restored to the freshness of her first love, glorious and holy. That nearness, that intimacy of bridal affections, was conceived in a past eternity, wrought out in time, and will be brought to fruition after the rapture. Of that time John writes in Revelation 19:7-9, "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white... blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb." John also tells us that after a thousand years of rule with Christ, His bride will be as radiant as on her wedding day. We learn this from Revelation 21:8, "And I John saw the Holy City New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

"God and the Lamb shall there  
The light and temple be,  
And radiant hosts forever share  
The unveiled mystery."

*J.N.D.*

*To be cont'd.*

## **Questions And Answers (2)**

*Q3. How can someone sin against the Holy Spirit (Mt. 12:31-32; Mk. 3:29-30)?*

A3. The Lord referred to this sin as speaking injuriously against the Holy Spirit. To understand what this means, we must read the passages before these verses, especially Mark 3:30. The Pharisees, after they had heard John the Baptist, had seen all the works of the Lord Jesus, and had heard His teaching, said that the Lord Jesus cast out demons by the spirit of Satan. Then the Lord said to them that speaking injuriously, or blaspheming against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, neither in this age nor in the coming one.

Many Christians are afraid that they have committed this sin. Well, I can tell you, if you are afraid that you have done so, you obviously have not. Those who have done it will never be bothered about it. God sears their heart. On the other hand God's goodness leads to repentance (Rom 2:4) and without God's working in the heart, no one will ever repent, that is how bad we are! Yet God commands us to repent, and repent we must if we do not want to go to hell. God would not lead any to repentance to whom He will not give forgiveness.

Now that we are on the subject, let me say a few things on the words: "Not in this age nor in the one to come." There is such a thing as forgiveness for the time being but not for eternity. Ahab experienced this when he humbled himself (1 Ki. 21:29). God gave him another chance that, we now know, he did not use. God delayed Ahab's judgment on earth. There is also such a thing as forgiveness for eternity but not for the present. Moses is an example of this. No matter how he pleaded, he was not allowed to enter the promised land (Dt. 3:25-26). But we know that he will receive forgiveness in the coming age, for he has already been seen in glory by Peter, James, and John. Those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit,

however, will neither here on earth ("in this age") nor in the future ("in the age to come") receive forgiveness. They will stand before the Great White Throne and be sentenced to eternal judgment (Rev. 20:11-15).

*Q4. To be a candidate for heaven one must pay restitution (Lev. 6:1-5; Ezek. 33:15). How did the thief on the cross restore everything he had stolen?*

A4. There is an important misunderstanding here. The only way anyone can be assured of a place in heaven is by believing that it was necessary for the Lord Jesus to die for his or her sins, and to believe that His death is sufficient (1 Pet. 2:24).

Still, it is true that God wants us to pay restitution if at all possible. That is clear from the two passages referred to in the question. God has not changed His mind about that, but our salvation does not depend on it! From Leviticus it is clear that we should repay generously, Zacchaeus understood this, and he did far more than the law required (Lk. 19:8). So it will be with today's sinners who repent, from now on they want to do God's will, but they do so *because they are saved, not because they want to be saved!* The Spirit within them prompts them to do God's will, and repaying debts they owe is one aspect of doing God's will.

And so the thief, no doubt, wanted to pay restitution, for he belonged to the Lord; but he could not, for he died a few hours later before he had an opportunity to do so. His going to heaven did not depend on doing anything, but on believing in the Lord Jesus. Neither does our going to heaven depend on anything we do (Eph. 2:8-10); it is pure grace that brings us there. The good works are prepared for those who do go to heaven. We do not do them to earn anything, but because we love to glorify God in all we do.

*Q5. What is the significance of offerings, tithes, and alms given to the worship of God?*

A5. Generally, offerings in the Old Testament were a symbolical way of expressing the need for a substitute in order for the individual sinner, or the people as a whole, to receive forgiveness (Lev. 1-7). The Lord required that the Israelites brought such sacrifices according to the sin they had committed or as a yearly remembrance of their sinful condition and God's atonement. Yet, there were some offerings of a material kind as well, such as the freewill offerings for the tabernacle. This offering was made so that the tabernacle could be built. This latter type of offering we may still bring today so that needed facilities to do the work of the Lord can be built or purchased. The offerings for sin are no longer required, for our sacrifice is the Lord Jesus, and He has been slain for our sins (Heb. 10:18).

Alms are referred to in Acts 24:27. In his Second Epistle to the Corinthians (ch. 8), Paul had told them that they should set money aside to help their brethren in Judea who were suffering. In Acts 24, he and a few others bring these gifts to Jerusalem. And in Hebrews 13:16 the Lord tells us not to forget to give alms, though the word itself is not mentioned. So it is clear that today we should also be prepared to give. 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 are very instructive on this subject.

In the Old Testament, the Israelites were told how much they should give. They had to give the tithe, the tenth part, of everything they earned or harvested. These tithes were for the priests, so they could do the service in the tabernacle.

In the New Testament we are not told how much to give. Yet, as we said above, in the Epistles there is frequent reference to the need for saints to give. Christians should realize that all they possess, even their own lives, belongs to God. And Paul shows that when we give, it is a fruit of having become a Christian. By giving, we glorify God, and God will reward us. So Paul says to the Philippians, "I seek fruit abounding to your account" (Phil. 4:17).

*Q6. How can someone prevent his or her daily prayer from being the same each day (Mt. 6:7-9)?*

A6. First of all, we need to read carefully. The Lord does not say that we must not repeat, but that our repetition must not be vain, hollow, lacking reality. For example, the Lord teaches us to "always pray and not faint" (Lk. 18:1-8). It is not the repetition itself that the Lord objects to. It may be helpful to remember the times when we were young. When we asked our fathers for something, they did not always answer immediately. Often we had to repeat our question, but we did so in different words. This is what we should do when we pray to our heavenly Father. We should bring our request before Him, thanking Him for who He is, for what He has done, and telling Him why we ask Him (1 Thess. 5:17-18). We should always carefully consider whether what we ask is according to His will, but we should feel free to ask. He loves to give and will do so if it is for our good.



*Q7. What is the importance of fasting today when compared to the time of Christ? Will fasting oblige God to bless and answer a person's prayer?*

A7. First of all, there is no commandment in the Bible to fast. In the Old Testament, fasting generally was accompanied by prayer and mourning. Godly people did so when they felt a need to humble themselves before God. The first mention of it is in Judges 20:26 just after Israel had lost a battle. They had tried to punish Benjamin for their protection of ungodly persons, but were themselves severely beaten. Then their need drove them to fast and pray, and God gave them the victory the next day. Other examples in the Old Testament are: Samuel (1 Sam. 7:5-6), David (2 Sam. 12:16), Nehemiah (Neh. 1:4), Esther (4:16), Daniel (Dan. 9), Anna (Lk. 2:37 — although this is in the New Testament, it was before the Lord's public ministry). All of these fasted and mourned, humbling themselves about the condition they realized they were in. They did this, not because they were told to do so, but because their own heart prompted them to fast.

In the New Testament we also have examples of fasting: The Lord fasted in the wilderness as the humble Man (Mt. 4:1-2), the assembly in Antioch fasted when they were about to send out Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:3), and Paul and those with him fasted when they chose elders in the assemblies (Acts 14:23). In these cases there is no evidence of mourning, although it may well have been present in the Lord's case. The common feature is humble prayer. But, as with the Old Testament accounts, the fasting was not due to a God-given command to fast, but prompted by a heart-felt need to do so.

We may fast regularly, but we ought to realize that it can easily become a ritual and lose its value. We see this when the people ask the Lord: "Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done now so many years?" (Zech. 7:3). Obviously they did not feel an inner need for doing so, otherwise they would not even have asked. And in His answer, the Lord showed what was in their heart, "When ye fasted and mourned... did ye really fast unto Me?" They did it because they wanted blessing, not because they really mourned or felt a need for humbling themselves. If fasting becomes a habit, or if we need to be told to fast, the basic ingredient, a humble, dependent attitude, is obviously missing and fasting has lost its purpose. Therefore, we are never told to fast, though often told to pray.

As to the second part of the question, we should realize that God is never obliged to do anything for us. All He does, all the prayers He answers, are purely a token of His free grace toward us. The only "obligation" God has (reverently spoken) is toward the Lord Jesus, because of the work He has done on the cross. Therefore we read, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous (because of the "obligation" toward the Lord Jesus) to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9).

## **Outline For Bible Study (44)**

### **91. Hezekiah's Sickness and his Departure — 2 Kings 20; 2 Chronicles 32:24-33**

#### *Outline*

1. Hezekiah's Illness and Restoration 2 Ki. 20:1-11
2. Hezekiah's Pride 2 Ki. 20:12-21

#### *Explanation*

1. This God-fearing king received many blessings and answers to prayer. Like Jehoshaphat and other predecessors, he followed the example of David. The greatest proof of God's mercy was Hezekiah's healing and the extension of his life (Ps. 103:1-5).

2. In the end, however, Hezekiah's pride grieved the Lord, and judgment was announced (Prov. 16:18). Yet, when he humbled himself, the judgment was postponed (2 Chr. 32:26).

#### *Lesson*

Hezekiah experienced God's promise to those who do His will ("I will cause you to dwell" — Jer. 17:7), but he also tasted the results of seeking help from man. As a result, he had to hear the judgment of God ("I will cast you out" — Jer. 17:15).

## 92. Reigns of Manasseh, Ammon, and Josiah — 2 Kings 21:1-23:30; 2 Chronicles 33-35

### *Outline*

1. Manasseh and Amon 2 Ki. 21; 2 Chr. 33
2. Josiah removed the Idols 2 Ki. 23:4-20; 2 Chr. 34:1-7
3. The Law is Found 2 Ki. 22:8-23:3; 2 Chr. 34:14-33
4. The Passover Kept 2 Ki. 23:21-23; 2 Chr. 35:1-19
5. Josiah's Death 2 Ki. 23:28-30; 2 Chr. 35:20-25 71

### *Explanation*

1. Manasseh, the wicked son of the God-fearing Hezekiah, destroyed his father's work (2 Ki. 21:1-7; 2 Chr. 33:1-19). The results were disastrous. Because of his sins, Judah came under judgment (Jer. 15:4; 2 Ki. 21:9-15). Though he later repented (2 Chr. 33:12-20), the people remained apostate. Under his godless son, Amon, they sped towards their doom.

2. Josiah was the opposite of his wicked father, Amon. At an early age he took a decided stand against all evil; he walked with Jehovah and turned not aside to the right hand nor to the left (Ps. 21:5-6).

3. Josiah humbled himself when the book of the law was found (Ps. 34:17). His heart and conscience were tender and subject to God's Word; God dealt in grace and postponed the judgment.

5. However, against God's will Josiah fought with the King of Egypt and was killed in battle. He did not live to see the terrible judgment of God over his unfaithful people; the Lord saved him from this grief by taking him away. There was a great mourning for him (2 Chr. 35:24-25). During Josiah's reign, God gave His last witness in Judah before the exile (the prophet Jeremiah — Jer. 1:1-2).

### *Lesson*

We see how that blessing often depends on one righteous man and especially on a God-fearing king! Therefore we should thank God and pray for those in leadership in the Church and for those in authority in the state.

Although Josiah's thorough abolition of idolatry and his reinstating of the worship of Jehovah once more delayed the impending judgment over Judah (Ezek. 22:30), yet the people only turned to the Lord outwardly, without giving their whole heart (Jer. 3:10). Today we often see this same condition in Christendom (2 Tim. 3:5). Such half-hearted repentance is of little value before God.

*To be cont'd*