

GROWING IN GRACE

2 Peter 3:17, 18

Intro: The Christian life begins with the new birth. We are born again, a second birth, according to 1 Peter 1:23. Our first birth is a physical birth; our second birth is a spiritual birth. But, although the expression is translated the same way, when our Lord spoke to Nicodemus about being born again, a better translation in John 3 would be being born from above. Cf. John 3:3, 7. The Lord also spoke of the new birth to Nicodemus as being born of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit.

We didn't really have anything to do with our first birth, and we are not the ones who bring about our new birth. It is a work of God through the Holy Spirit by which we receive divine life and are made new creatures in Christ. The first evidence that we are born again is that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We call upon people to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ knowing that, when they do, it will be evidence that God has done a saving work in their souls. We are saved by the grace of God completely apart from any work that we might do. All three Persons of the Godhead are involved in the salvation of every person who is ever saved. And, since we are "born...of God," we become members of the family of God.

However, the new birth is not an end in itself; it is just a beginning. This is what Peter was concerned about as he wrote his last letter which was to be a part of the Word of God. And it is very significant that in the last verse of this last epistle he spoke about growing. And this is what he told the believers of that day that they needed to do:

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge
of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

These words are found in 2 Pet. 3:18.

The NASB translates it, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Actually the word "the" is not used in the Greek text, but it is supplied by the translators to make the meaning clearer. But the Greek does indicate that "grace" and "knowledge" are to be taken together, not separately.

Although Peter did not make a point of it in this verse, yet we can see from this important verse that God's purpose in saving us is to make us like the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the object of spiritual growth -- to make us like Christ. And so it is an inner growth, a growth in character. The Holy Spirit by Whom we have experienced this new birth con-

tinues to work in us to make us like our Lord. This why the Apostle Paul said that it was by the grace of God he was what he was.

— I want us to look at this verse tonight to make sure that we understand what it is saying, and then we will go on to speak of other things related to our spiritual growth in the next several Sunday evenings.

The first thing to notice about this verse is:

I. IT IS A COMMAND.

Everything about being a Christian is new to us when we are first saved, and one thing that every Christian needs to be told is that he, or she, needs to grow.

Peter stated this in the present tense by which he meant that, whatever else you may be doing now that you are a Christian, you should be growing right now! It is not something for you to think about doing in the future, but something that you must be doing right now. It is a present imperative. You and I are responsible before God to make sure that we are growing spiritually.

— But this word indicates another thing that it is important for us to understand. The present tense in the Greek not only indicates something that is going on right now, but it speaks of something that must continue to go on. And so we could translate it as A. T. Robertson does in his commentary on 2 Peter, "Keep on growing..."

And so it means that we are to grow, and to keep on growing. And it makes no difference how long we have known the Lord nor how much we have grown, as long as we live we are going to need to keep growing. The oldest and most mature Christian who is living today still needs to grow.

Now the reason for this is that none of us is perfectly like the Lord Jesus Christ yet. I have known some Christians during my lifetime which I felt were very much like the Lord, and it was a real blessing to be with them. But as much like the Lord as they were, they were still not completely like Him. And this work of God in our hearts will not be finished until we see the Lord. The Apostle John told us this when he wrote 1 John 3:2, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God..."

— I am sure that most of you are well enough acquainted with the epistles of Peter to know that this is not the first time he had spoken of our need to grow spiritually. In 1 Peter 2:2, 3 you will find these words:

As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word,
that ye may grow thereby:
If so be that ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

I want to come back to these verses at a later time, but I just want to point out that we are to look forward to growing in the Lord like a newborn baby looks forward to being fed. A baby lives to eat. He loves his mother's milk. He looks forward to it. Nothing pleases him more. And that is the way we are to be. There is something wrong with a person who claims to be a Christian but who is not interested in growing spiritually. It probably is the case that such a person is not really saved. A true Christian is going to want to grow.

But now let us look at the two areas about which we need to be concerned. If we don't understand this, we don't understand what spiritual growth is.

II. "GROW IN THE GRACE AND KNOWLEDGE OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST."

Spiritual growth comes about when we continually focus our attention upon one Person. And it is important to notice how Peter spoke of Him in this verse. He is "our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

I don't think that there would be the controversy going on today that there is if people would read their Bibles more carefully than they do. Can Jesus Christ be our Savior and not be our Lord? Evidently Peter did not think so. He is the One Who died to save us. It is His blood that has cleansed us from our sins. He bought us at a price that is greater than we can possibly understand now, but as a result of what He did for us on Calvary, we are, according to the Apostle Paul, "not our own." Cf. 1 Cor. 6:19, 20. So He is both our Savior and our Lord. And it is our great joy to be able to say, "our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." He came from heaven to save us! He died taking the penalty for sins upon Himself! We are His, and He is ours! This is nothing but pure grace.

It was "grace" that saved us, and we are to grow in that grace. What did Peter have in mind?

The word "grace" when related to God is always intended to produce humility in us. It is important for us to understand that all that we have in Christ is undeserved. And this ought to make us love the Lord more and more. We must never forget that our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, and our relationship with God is based upon grace, unmerited

grace, unfailing grace. You can see the grace of God all through the Scriptures. And all of us need to be growing in our understanding of the grace of our Lord.

— But, as we should also know, grace means STRENGTH! If we are to be like the Lord Jesus (and we all are), we need more strength than we have in ourselves. We need the enabling grace of God, grace that holds us when our strength fails, or when we get discouraged with the way, or with our own failures.

And so this word which Peter has given to us means that we are to grow in grace in the sense that we are learning to get our strength day by day from the Lord. As you read your Bible, notice how much in the OT and the NT the word strength appears. It will amaze you. This was what the children of Israel sang about when they crossed the Red Sea leaving Egypt. This is what the Lord promised His people in Isa. 40:31. This is what the Apostle Paul was speaking of in Phil. 4:13. What a difference it makes in our lives when we realize how weak we are, but what an abundant supply of grace we have in our Lord Jesus Christ.

But we still have another word: "knowledge."

— When we think about the Lord and about His Word there are two kinds of knowledge that we need to be concerned about. There are many facts that we need to learn about our Lord -- about His holiness, His perfection, His wisdom, His power, His mercy -- and I could go on and on mentioning other things about Him. We might call this the doctrine of Christ, the teaching that we receive in the Scriptures about Christ.

But the other knowledge we can describe as practical knowledge, a personal acquaintance with Christ, an intimate fellowship with Christ. As Christians we soon learn that we are not just learning about Christ as a Person in past history, but we are learning about a living Savior, One with Whom we can walk in personal fellowship, One who is with us every moment of every day. This is what we need to grow in. Grow in our personal acquaintance with the Son of God. Grow in our dependence upon Him. Grow in our love for Him. Grow in our desire to be like Him, and to actually grow in our likeness to all that He is. This is what we need. And this is what Peter was instructing the believers to do in that day.

— And God has given us a book which was written to tell us all that we can possibly know about Him. To many Christians the Lord never gets out of the pages of history, but to all of us He should be a personal Friend with Whom we enjoy the most precious fellowship every day that we live. Cf. Rev. 3:20.

And, regardless of how long we have known the Lord, we can always enjoy a closer relationship and more wonderful fellowship than we have experienced up to the present time.

And the better we know our Lord, the more we will share the joy that Peter felt in his heart when he concluded this epistle with the words, "To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen."

But now let me close with just a few words about verse 17. Here we have one answer to the question:

III. WHY IS SPIRITUAL GROWTH SO IMPORTANT?

We have already seen that it is important, extremely important, because it has to do with God's purpose in saving us. We are saved, and then we begin to grow in the likeness of the One Who has saved us.

But we have another reason in verse 17.

Peter had written about some of the false and evil things that had gone on in the past, and were still going on in his day. And I might add that they are still going on today. Every one of them is a threat to our fellowship with the Lord. Error in any form, even an exalted opinion of ourselves, can cause us to fall from our own steadfastness. Peter knew what that was. He had his denial of the Lord firmly implanted in his memory, not to torment him, but to keep him reminded of this very thing which was his concluding exhortation to us in his part of the written Word. Only continual growth can safeguard us against getting away from the Lord in our daily living, which in turn will always lead to a "fall."

Concl: If these verses have done nothing more for us, I hope that they have alerted us to the fact that the one thing we need is to be growing, growing in our knowledge of God's grace, and in our experience of God's grace, and growing in our knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in our personal fellowship with Him.

I hope I have whetted your appetite tonight. The Lord willing, we will look more into this in the following Sunday nights. But, in the meantime, make sure that you are growing.

GROWING IN ASSURANCE

2 Timothy 1:12

Intro: One detail about salvation over which the Church has been divided has been the question of assurance. It not only has to do with a person's peace of heart that he is saved, or she is saved, but with the duration of salvation. Is salvation eternal, or is it possible to be lost again once we have been saved?

In the light of Scripture it is hard to see how there can be any question about assurance, and yet it continues to be an issue today.

The text which I have chosen for tonight is one that is well-known, and it has been the means of bringing peace of heart to countless numbers of believers. Doubtless there have been many who have claimed this verse who had no right to do so, but it still is one of the strong statements of Scripture having to do with our salvation.

This verse is especially significant because it is found in the last epistle which Paul wrote under the direction of the Holy Spirit, that is, his last epistle which was to be a part of the revealed Word of God. And so it speaks of his conviction about his own salvation as he approached the end of his earthly sojourn. I have reference to 2 Timothy 1:12. Let me read it to you, but I will begin with verse 8 and read down through verse 14. (Read.)

The last two verses of this passage (13 and 14) make it clear that the Apostle Paul did not ignore the importance of human responsibility. He was like the Apostle John in this regard. John believed that if a person is truly saved there will be certain practical evidences of his salvation, such as the avoidance of sin, obedience to God, love for the people of God, and so on.

One thing that has made assurance such a big problem to many has been the fact that we have used faulty methods in winning people to Christ. We have ignored the truths about salvation which the Apostle Paul mentioned in the early part of the verses which I read to you. We talk to people about the Lord. We show them that they are sinners and in need of a Savior. We tell them about Christ, and ask them to believe in Him. They say that they will. And so we pray for them, and maybe ask them to pray giving them the words to say. They do what we tell them, and then we tell them that they can be sure that they are going to heaven because they have done the right thing. And we send them away thinking about what they have done, and have assured them of their salvation

because they have believed in Christ. The problem is that experience has shown that many, many people who have been taken through this procedure never do show by their lives that they have been saved. Instead, they go back into the world and may never have any more to do with God, thinking that salvation was not for them.

We need to be very careful about telling people that they are saved just because they have prayed a prayer that we have told them to pray, or because they publicly have indicated that they want to be a Christian.

And so the first thing that we need to get across to people is this:

I. SALVATION IS A DIVINE WORK, A WORK OF GOD.

This means that assurance of salvation comes initially through the realization that God has done a work in our hearts.

Our text (v. 12) expresses the truth that God "is able to keep" us.

Listen to some other passages which say the same thing. Let us go to the words of the Lord Jesus Himself, words found in John 10:27-29:

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them,
and they follow me.
And I give unto them eternal life;
and they shall never perish,
neither shall any (man) pluck them out of my hand.
My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all;
and no (man) is able to pluck them out
of my Father's hand.

Such words give us assurance. When the Lord gives us eternal life, we are in His hands, and no one, not even we ourselves, can take us away from the Lord.

In Phil. 1:6 Paul wrote,

Being confident of this very thing,
that he which hath begun a good work in you
will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

This gives us assurance. God is the One Who started this work of salvation for us, not when we believed, but in eternity past. He is the One Who saw to it that we heard the Gospel, and He worked in our hearts so that we would believe.

We also have that mountain peak of Scripture at the end of Romans 8 in which we are assured that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God. See verses 38 and 39.

We also have those wonderful words in the book of Jude, verses 24, 25 -- a benediction:

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 Saviour,
be glory and majesty, dominion and power,
both now and ever. Amen.

The first step toward assurance comes in understanding that salvation is a work of God. If He had not sought us, and if the Holy Spirit had not drawn us to Christ, we would never have come. There is much more involved in salvation than what takes place between a Christian and a non-Christian when the Christian is seeking to lead the non-Christian to faith in Christ.

People need to understand that even the faith to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ comes from God. Cf. Eph. 2:8, 9. And so assurance begins by understanding that we do not save ourselves, nor do we keep ourselves saved. Salvation is a divine work which God does in our hearts.

The second thing that is important for us to understand about salvation is:

II. ASSURANCE IS STRENGTHENED AS WE INCREASE IN OUR KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST.

The Apostle Paul stated it this way: "I know WHOM I have believed." Think of all that stands behind that statement. There was a day in Paul's life when there was no one he hated as much as he hated the Lord Jesus Christ. But then the Lord met him on the road to Damascus, and a relationship was established between Saul of Tarsus and the Lord Jesus Christ which will never end. And the more that Saul of Tarsus knew about the Lord, the more he loved the Lord, the more he trusted the Lord, and the more he knew that he was eternally safe in the Lord's hands. That is one reason that we need to realize that assurance is a growing conviction in our hearts that nothing can ever change the fact that we are saved.

This is one reason that the words of the Apostle Peter which we considered together last Sunday are important even as far as the assurance of salvation is concerned. Peter said, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour **Jesus Christ.**" His power knows no limit. His love never wavers nor changes. It is impossible for Him to fail us. His record of faithfulness to His people is perfect. One reason that people waver in their assurance is because they do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as they need to know Him.

Oh, there is so much in those word, "I know whom I have believed."

When I think of knowing the Lord in this way, my thoughts go to dear Edith Willies whom I have mentioned many times before. The Lord brought her into Lucille's life and into my life at a time when we really needed her. She had walked with the Lord for a long, long time. When she was preparing to leave the States to go back to Switzerland to help her ailing twin brother, she got sick and was unable to travel. And she told us that in all of the years she had traveled throughout the world, going from the States to Argentina, and to Switzerland, and to many other countries, she had never had to change her flight plans! At that particular time it was necessary for her to get to her brother as fast as she could. But not knowing how soon she would be able to travel, she said this to us. She said, "I have known the Lord so long and so well for so many years, that I know that He will not fail me now." And He didn't! She improved, and was on her way to help her brother in his final days before the Lord took him to heaven. And it wasn't very long after that the Lord took Edith, too.

What does it mean when you and I say, "I know whom I have believed"? How well do you know the Savior? It doesn't take a lot of knowledge to convince you that since your salvation is in His hands, you don't have to worry about whether or not you are going to get to heaven. The better you know Him, the stronger your assurance will be.

But let me point out a third thing from our text:

III. THE APOSTLE PAUL WAS BELIEVING IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AT THE MOMENT HE WAS WRITING THIS EPISTLE.

Let me point out something that ought to be a blessing to you. When Paul spoke of his faith he expressed it in the perfect tense. And that is the way it is translated in our English version. It means that at some time in the past he trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior, and he had never stopped trusting Him for his salvation!

There are those who tell us that we can't be sure that we are saved unless we can remember when and where we first trusted Christ. Paul would not agree. Paul would say, "Are you trusting Him now?" Saving faith continues. And so it is like Paul said, "I know Whom I have believed, and in Whom I continue to believe." Nothing had changed between our Lord and Paul from the time that Paul first came to the Savior. He never really tells us exactly when that was, and maybe he was not sure himself. But he knew that he had trusted the

Lord, and that he was still trusting the Lord. And so he could add, I stand persuaded that He is able to guard my deposit (as in the bank of heaven) from robbery or any loss. This is how Robertson has expressed the meaning of the original language. The Lord is watching over our souls, and thus we are perfectly and eternally secure.

How long can He do this, and for how many of us can He do it?

"Against that day," or until that day. What day? According to Phil. 1:6 it is "the day of Jesus Christ." That is the day when the Lord will come, and our salvation will be complete!

Concl: There is much more that could be said about assurance, but we will have to save that for another time.

But I hope that we have seen enough to know that assurance is not something that we suddenly have when we are first saved, and that it never changes. Assurance is a growing conviction, an ever-increasing and stronger conviction, the result of many things that God does in our lives, in which we, too, can ultimately say that we stand convinced, unshaken in our knowledge that we are secure forever in Christ.

So if you are lacking in assurance, or you want to help someone else who needs assurance, don't talk about what you have done, or what that other person has done, talk about the Lord, and what it means that He is the One we are trusting to save us. Our faith is strong sometimes; at other times it is weak. But if we are trusting Him, even when our faith is weak, He remains faithful. He never gives up on us.

I would ask each one of you tonight, Are you trusting in the Lord Jesus for your salvation? Do you believe that His work on the Cross was enough to satisfy God concerning your sins? The Bible teaches us that it was. In fact, it tells that that is the only way of salvation. Then trust Him. Spend your days learning of Him. The more you know of Him, the more you will love Him, and the stronger will be your assurance not only that He will not fail you, but also that He cannot fail you. What a wonderful Savior we have!

THE WORD -- A LAMP AND A LIGHT

Psalm 119:105

Intro: Psalm 119 is a Psalm of the Word of God. Perhaps, because of its length, and because of the many times the Word is referred to, it would be better to call it the Psalm of the Word. There are 176 verses in this Psalm, and there are only two verses which do not mention the Word in some way at least once. Cf. vv. 122, 132. But there are those which refer to the Word more than once, so are more than enough to go around. If I have counted correctly, there are 38 times that the sacred writings are called "the Word." And that is the term that is used in the text which I have chosen for my message tonight.

Let us examine the verse in detail, and then I want to draw some observations which I trust will be helpful for all of us.

I. THE VERSE IS A PRAYER.

Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it is a part of a prayer. It could stand alone, but it doesn't. This whole paragraph is a prayer. The Lord is mentioned in verse 107, and the word "thy" is found in every verse.

This is not really unique for this part of the Psalm since all of the Psalm is really a prayer. But it is important to note that this is a prayer. When the Psalmist wrote this, he was speaking to God. He was telling the Lord what the Word was to him -- "a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

People don't always tell the truth, but since this writer was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and since he was speaking to God, we know that it was true. God's Word was to him a lamp for his feet, and a light for his path.

We don't know who wrote this Psalm. Some think that it was written after the exile, and that Ezra may have been the writer, but I am inclined to agree with Calvin who, although he had to admit that we don't know for sure who the writer was, said that it is hard to keep from referring to King David when speaking about the Psalm, or in reading the Psalm. Calvin's actual words were these:

As David surpassed all other in point of poetical and devotional talent, I will not scruple [hesitate] occasionally to insert his name (VI, p. 400).

However, whoever the writer may have been, we must assume

that he was telling the truth. The Word was indeed "a lamp unto" his "feet, and a light unto" his "path." It would be wonderful if we could all tell the Lord the same thing -- and perhaps we can!

II. "THY WORD."

We use this term for the Bible all of the time, don't we? We call it the Word of God, and this is undoubtedly what the Psalmist meant. It was the Word of God which was a lamp and a light to him.

Why is the Bible called the Word, or the Word of God, so often? It is because it is a book which originated with God, but more specifically it is the only book which was spoken by God! As the little children's song tells us, "It's the only book that God has given." When we read the Scriptures, we may be reading what Moses wrote, or David, or Matthew, or Luke, but all of them were so directed in their writings that what we have is God's Word.

God's people love it for that very reason. And the longer we know the Lord, the more we love His Word. And the more we read it, the more we love to read it. We have found in our lives that there is no book like this Book. It is the Word which God has spoken to and for His people, a Word which never changes, a Word which is absolutely true, and a Word which tells us what God wants us to believe, what He wants us to be, and what He wants us to do. It is all here, and we don't have to go outside of Scripture to find that which we need every day for the nourishment of our souls. Read good books which help you to understand the Scriptures, but never let any book take the place of the Book. This book gave joy to Jeremiah when he could not find any other reason to be joyful. It was more important to Job than food for his body. The Bible is full of testimonies of the delight that the Lord's people have always found in His Word.

A prayer like this is a testimony to a spiritually healthy child of God. We all have to make this discovery, and how it must delight God's heart to hear any of His children say, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." On the other hand, it must grieve Him whenever He sees that we are neglecting His Word. Spiritual growth can only come through the Word. Cf. 1 Peter 2:2, 3.

III. THE TITLES WHICH DAVID GAVE TO GOD'S WORD.

He called it "a lamp" and "a light."

Soon it is going to be camp time again. And we will all pack

our suitcases, get our sleeping bags, and head for camp. But there is one thing that I have found very important when I go to camp, and sometimes I take a couple of them in case one does not work. I am talking about a flashlight.

There are some outside lights at camp, but they don't cover all of the grounds. And when night comes it gets dark. That is when we need extra lights. That is when you see the flashlights come out.

When night comes, we turn on the lights in our homes. If we are out in our cars after the sun goes down, we turn on our headlights. It is against the law to drive around without lights after dark.

Now I have said all of that to remind you of something that is very obvious which has to do with our text, and yet it is so easy to miss one point that the Psalmist was making. He was speaking of this world in which we live as a dark place. Sin has made it dark. This means that people don't really know why they are here. They don't really know what they need. They don't really know how to live. They don't know what they need to know about God, nor about Christ, nor about the Holy Spirit, nor about life after death. We are living in a world of the deepest darkness, like the darkness that fell upon Egypt during the plagues in Moses' day, a darkness which can be felt. What we need is light, and this is exactly what God has given us in His Word.

In Psalm 119:130 this same Psalmist said,

The entrance of thy words giveth light;
it giveth understanding to the simple.

All of us by nature are ignorant of the things that we need to know. We are in darkness, and the easiest thing that can happen to us at night without a light is that we can get lost. And that is exactly where the world is tonight. People are lost. They can only guess as to what is the best thing for themselves or for others. They need light, and we need light, too. And the only place that we can find that light is in the Word of God. It is "a lamp" for our feet, and "a light" for our path.

Now I know that the writers of the Psalms wrote Hebrew poetry. And this is what we have in Psalm 119. But the Psalmists never multiplied words just for the sake of filling space. We know that the writers of Scripture were directed by the Holy Spirit as to the very words which they used. And so no word was written just to fill up space. Every word has a distinct purpose, or it would not be there.

The Psalmist here used two words for light. He said that the

Word of God was "a lamp" and "a light." Why did he use these two terms?

Well, let me tell you what the difference seems to be. The word "lamp" is sometimes translated in Scripture with reference to the light of a candle. It would compare with our flashlights. "Light," on the other hand, speaks of the light of day, or the full light of the sun.

Sometimes we are aware that we need to know what our next steps should be. And then the Word to us becomes "a lamp." It may not shine very far in the distance, but at least we always know the next step to take. Often our lives are like that. At other times, it seems that our paths are full of light, almost dazzling in brightness. The Word can give us such light that it seems that the darkness of the world has been dispelled, and we are walking in the light. When we have the Word of God, we don't need any other light. That is the reason we are warned against the wisdom of this world. People may have good intentions, but they can so easily mislead us, and be misled themselves. God has given us everything in His Word to tell us what we need to be, what we need to know, and what we need to do. The rest of this particular stanza in Psalm 119 shows that the Psalmist was totally dedicated to living according to the precious Word of God.

Now I don't need to tell you that the character of the Word has not changed. Here at the end of our very sophisticated twentieth century the Bible is the only true "lamp," and it is the only true "light." But let me tell you something else. We are just as much in need of that "lamp" and that "light" as any generation before us has needed it. There never will be a generation of people who do not need the Word of God as much as Adam and Eve did in the very beginning of time. What you and I need is to be just as committed to the Word of God as the Psalmist declared himself to be in this stanza.

Now let me call your attention to two other words in this Psalm. There are only five words in this verse in the original Hebrew, but every word is very important. The words that I am thinking about now are the words:

IV. "MY FEET" AND "MY PATH."

It is God's Word, but "my feet" and "my path."

We use our feet for walking, don't we? And our walk, according to Scripture, is the way we live.

It seems that here the Psalmist was going from our need to know each step that we should take, but also that we need to be sure that our "path" is taking us in the right direction. The Bible gets very specific about the kind of people we should be, and the way we should live. But it also reveals to us "the path" we are taking to glory.

How thankful we should be for all of this! If it were not for the Word of God, we could be just as far off the track as many people are who are living in this world. The darkness has blinded their eyes, and they do not know where they are going. The Bible gives us perfect guidance for our lives, and keeps us head in the right direction. And it is the only book that provides us with such guidance.

Concl: Now for David, or whoever the Psalmist was, to say, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path," meant that he, by God's grace, was using the Word for the very purposes that God has given it to us. Not every child of God can say that. Or there are many like some of the kings of Israel and Judah, they start out right, but they don't continue. It is easy for us to get proud, or to feel that we can be self-sufficient, and we lose sight of how much we need the Word of God.

In closing let me give you some Scriptures to help us to see how the Word of God is meant to be used in our lives. I can't give you all of them, just some who speak about the Word as our "lamp" or "light."

The first is Psalm 3, 4.

The second is Proverbs 6:20-26, especially verse 23.

I have told some of you about a friend of mine I had when I was in high school whose Dad gave him a Bible with these words printed on the outside of the front cover:

This Book will keep you from sin,
or sin will keep you from this Book.

These are days when we need the warnings of the Word of God as much as we need anything else.

And so along with that passage we can place a NT passage: Eph. 5:6-17.

And then a final passage: 2 Pet. 1:19-21.

May God give each of us grace to be able to say what the Psalmist said to the Lord in prayer, and then to stick with it all of the days of our lives. There can be no growth with the precious Word of God directing us day by day.

WHERE DOES THE WORD BELONG?

Colossians 3:16

Intro: My text for tonight is found in a section of the epistle to the Colossians in which Paul was describing the new man in Christ, his character, and some of the things which he would be expected to do. The Apostle left no doubt but that a person in Christ is a new person. He is not the old made over, but a work of God which is absolutely new. He, or she, is interested in a quality of life completely different from the old life. More than that, a Christian is capable of living such a life. This is because the child of God is in Christ, and his life is to be nurtured by what Paul called in verse 16, "the word of Christ." And Paul's instruction to the Colossian believers was this, **"Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly in all wisdom."** This is what I want to consider with you tonight. And I want to answer the question, WHERE DOES THE WORD BELONG?

The Bible is often referred to as "the Word." It is called "the Word of God." Sometimes, "the word of the Lord." It is called with reference to the Gospel, "the word of faith," "the word of reconciliation," and "the word of truth" (although this latter expression is used for all of Scripture). It is called "the word of righteousness." It is "the Word of life." But Colossians 3:16 is the only place that it is called, "the Word of Christ." And so this title ought to attract our attention. It is clear that Paul could not have been referring to anything but the Scriptures, the Bible, the Word of God. Although we should recognize that when Paul wrote these words, the books of the New Testament had not yet been compiled as we have them today. So his reference must have been to the Old Testament Scriptures which he called, "the word of Christ."

Those Scriptures, to the best of our knowledge, were written over a period of 1500 years -- from the time of Moses who lived that long before Christ until Christ. The one book which may have been written earlier, was the book of Job, and, of course, we know that there was a period of about 400 years from the writing of the last Old Testament book until the birth of Christ. So it would probably be more accurate to say that the OT was written over a period of 1100 years.

There were many writers. We are not sure who all of them were, but there were many. Moses, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel were those who were the most prominent.

After Christ came the NT was written. And here we add the names of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter, and

Jude. In contrast with the OT, the NT was completed by the end of the first century, i.e., within a hundred years. And it is very likely that the NT writers all knew each other. But there never was any attempt on their part to organize their writings so that they would be harmonious with each other. The reason for the amazing unity that we find in the OT, and then in the NT, and then between the OT and the NT, is because every man who wrote a book of our Bible was directed in what he wrote by the Holy Spirit. And so, although we speak of the Bible as being made up of sixty-six books, it is in reality one Book! And this is one of the greatest evidences of its divine origin. That is why it is called so frequently, the Word of God. There were many who wrote, but it is most proper to speak of One Author, the Holy Spirit.

The reason we find so many titles for the Bible in the Scriptures themselves is because they are designed to tell us what the message of the Bible is. It is God's Book, and so it is called the Word of God. It contains nothing but the truth, divine truth, and so it is called the Word of truth. And so on with the other titles.

Why is it called, "the Word of Christ"?

I. THE WORD OF CHRIST.

This expression can mean the word from Christ, and delivered by Christ, or, the word about Christ. In view of all that we know about the writing of Scripture it would seem that the latter is the main emphasis in the expression. The Bible is a Book ABOUT Christ. It was written to tell us about Him. He is the theme of every book of the Bible. Lit., a literal translation what Paul wrote would be, the word of THE Christ, indicating not only that the Bible was about Christ, but that He is the only one Who could possibly have claimed that title because He is the only One Who fulfilled all that was revealed, all that was predicted about the Christ, the Messiah. It is impossible to read the Bible and come to any other conclusion than that "Jesus is ~~the~~ Christ, ~~the~~ Son of the living God," as John said He was. Cf. John 20:30, 31.

When John the Baptist sent to the Lord asking Him, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" (Matt. 11:3), the Lord could have told him, "There does not need to be another, nor could there have been another." No one else could possibly have fulfilled all of the qualifications. Truly the Bible is the Word from God about Christ -- from beginning to end!

There are many passages of Scripture which bear this out.

In John 5:39 we read that the Lord said to the Jews who wanted to kill Him,

Search the Scriptures;
for in them ye think ye have eternal life:
and they are they which testify of me.

The Lord did not refer them to just one part of the Scriptures, but said that they all testified of Him.

Later on in that chapter He told those Jews who claimed to be Moses' disciples,

For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me:
for he wrote of me (John 5:46).

This statement sounds ridiculous to many scholars, past and present, because of the huge period of time between Moses and Jesus. But this is no problem to those of us who believe that the Bible is the Word of God. The Holy Spirit revealed to and through Moses many precious truths which spoke of Christ.

And then, whoever has read Luke 24 with any understanding at all, would find it hard to forget what the Lord did with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus following His resurrection. Verse 27 tells us,

And beginning at Moses and all the prophets,
he expounded unto them **in all the scriptures**
the things concerning himself.

And then a little later the Lord did the same things with His disciples. And so we read in Luke 24:44, 45,

And he said unto them,
These are the words which I spake unto you,
while I was yet with you,
that all things must be fulfilled,
which were written in the law of Moses,
and in the prophets, and in the psalms,
concerning me.

Paul told Timothy in 2 Tim. 3:15,

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures,
which are able to make thee wise unto salvation
through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

The OT clearly teaches salvation through Christ Jesus, and only through Him.

The Apostle Peter confirmed that the Scriptures have Christ as their main theme when he wrote the words we find in 1 Pet. 1:10, 11,

Of which salvation the prophets have enquired
and searched diligently,
who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you:
Searching what, or what manner of time
the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify,

when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ,
and the glory that should follow.

In the OT we have types of Christ, prophecies of Christ, pre-incarnate appearances of Christ, descriptions of Christ. He is the One whose appearance every devout Jew was anticipating. In the Gospels we have the earthly life and ministry of Christ. In the epistles we have the Person and Work set forth in all of their glory and perfection. And the Book of the Revelation tells about the consummation of this age, and the glory of Christ in the New Heaven and the New Earth.

So, although this is the only time we find this expression in the Bible, no title could be more accurate than this: It is "the word of Christ." From Genesis to the Revelation the focus is continually upon Him.

Now it is one thing for me to tell you this tonight, but what are we supposed to do with this Word of Christ. Where does the Word of Christ belong?

Obviously, when we understand the nature of the Bible, we should all want a copy of this revelation from God about Christ. And we all do have a copy of it. Most of us have more than one copy. We even have several translations of it. We have two copies of it on our kitchen table. Lucille has her Bibles which she faithfully reads every morning, as many of you do. I always carry my NT in my pocket. A Bible is always in my brief case. I have something like fifteen Bibles on my book shelf of various translations, several of just the NT, and some of just the Pauline epistles. I have several Greek Testaments, and two Hebrews Bibles. Wouldn't you say that this enough?

The Apostle Paul would say, "No, that is not enough." It certainly is enough copies of the Word of the Christ, but what I mean is, "Isn't it enough that we each own our own copy of the Bible?" Again the Apostle would say, "No." "Why isn't it enough?", I might say to him. And he would say, "Because it is possible to have Bibles piled up all around you, and yet not have any of it IN you!" It is the Word of Christ "in" us which we need, and it is only the Word of Christ "in" us that will do us good. It is when the Word of Christ is "in" us, and continues "in" us, that wonderful things begin to happen in our lives.

So where does the Word of Christ belong? On our tables? Yes. On our desks? Yes. In our bedrooms? Yes. In our pockets and purses? Yes. But all of these places are not enough if it is not "IN" us, in our hearts, where it can work upon us and change us and so change the lives which we live.

And so my second point is:

II. THE WORD OF CHRIST IN US.

Paul wrote to the Colossians, "And let the word of Christ dwell in you." We could translate it, And let the word of the Christ INDWELL you, or, And let the word of the Christ BE AT HOME in you.

Now let me tell you something very important, and I hope all of you are listening to me. This is what we all need to realize: The Word of Christ is not going to be in our hearts unless we put it there. And it is not going to dwell there, be at home there, unless we keep it there! To be sure, the Lord gives us the desire, and He helps us in such a vital project, but you and I have to do it. The Word of Christ, which is contained between the covers of your Bible and mine, has to be put "in" us.

How do we do it?

There are several ways. I was born in a Christian home and I remember hearing it read to me before I could read it for myself. I heard it from my parents, my SS teachers, and my pastor. Perhaps you were like I was. Several people, more than I can remember now, sought to teach me what the Word means. As we got older we could read it for ourselves. This helped us to think about it (the Bible calls this, meditation). Then we started memorizing it, and we found ourselves believing it, and understanding more and more about it, and we knew that we ought to be obeying it. And gradually the Word of Christ has been written upon our hearts. And now we find ourselves drawn to read it every day, and we want to work our way through it year after year after year.

Have I been describing the way God has been dealing with you? It's not just the Bible on my desk that I need, but the Bible in my heart, dwelling there, living there, ministering to me, transforming me, teaching me, rebuking me, pointing me day after day to the Lord Jesus Christ, helping me to know Him better, to love Him more, and making me want to please Him above everything else and before anyone else. This is what that word "richly" means.

To have the Word of Christ dwelling "richly" in you means that you have it abundantly in you. If you are rich in money, you have a lot of money. If you are rich in the Word, you have a lot of it in you, teaching you, encouraging you, rebuking you, showing Christ to you. You know, there are some people you can't be with without talking about the Lord and His Word. They are hungry for the Book. They want to

learn about Christ. And they aren't satisfied just to learn verses, but they want to know what those verses mean. "Richly in all wisdom." Is it any wonder that Job said, "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12)? He didn't anything like as much as you and I do, and yet what he had meant more to him than those good meals that his wife set before him day after day. He was wealthy enough to be able to eat anything that he wanted to eat, but none of it, nor all of it, could compare with the joy he got from the Word of God.

Concl: I could go on with the rest of the verse, but this is enough for tonight. I hope that none of us will let this verse get away from us until some time in the future when we may read it again. If you have been neglecting the Word of God, ask the Lord to help you to know what it means to have the Word dwelling in you, at home in you.

You will remember that when our Lord was walking from the Upper Room to the Garden of Gethsemane with His disciples, He said to them, "Abide in me, and I in you" (John 15:4). Perhaps you have wondered how you could abide in the Lord, and enjoy the presence of the Lord with you in your life. It can only be done through getting the Word of Christ in you, in your heart, where it is going to do you good. Our Lord is so inseparably linked with His Word, that if He is to make His home in your heart, it can only be done through make His Word at home.

If we were giving the Word of Christ a home in our hearts, we would find it much harder to sin, much harder to doubt the Lord, much harder to miss times of fellowship with the Lord's people. The Psalmist said, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psa. 119:11).

When you read your Bible, look for Christ. He is there, from Genesis to Revelation. And let your heart feast upon Him, and you will soon find that He is making a different person out of you.

The Word of God does not promise us a life free from trials and testings. But it does promise us a life full of blessing if you are consistently making a home for the Christ and His Word in your hearts. Temptations are certain to come, but they lose their power if the Word of Christ is at home in our hearts. Be sure that this week the Bible is not only on your table, but in your heart. That is where it will do the greatest good.

Let me say one more word before I close.

The word "you" in this text, is plural. Paul, of course, meant that he was speaking to all of the church. Each one in the church was to see to it that the Word of Christ had a home in their hearts.

But he may have been saying something else. In addition to making it personal with every Colossian believer, he may have been saying to them as a church, as an assembly of believers, "Let the Word of Christ always be at home among you, in your midst, in your meetings and in your fellowship together."

People often say that Trinity Bible Church is unique among churches because here the Word of God is always taught. That is not true of all churches. Thank God it is still true of many churches throughout our country, but in many other churches where the Word of God used to be taught, today it's message of Christ is denied! I suggest to you that Paul was telling the people in the Colossian church, "Make sure that nothing ever takes the place of the Word of Christ in your fellowship. May the Word always be at home in your ministry and in your fellowship."

When we started Trinity back in 1981 we had evening classes for a time. Gary Custis taught Church History, and I have never forgotten a startling thing that he told me — and I have mentioned it to some of you before. He was talking about how the trend in the Lord's word historically has always been down, away from the truth, away from the Gospel, away from the Lord. I don't remember his exact words, but it was something like this. He said, "You know, Daddy, some day the man who is the pastor of Trinity Bible Church may deny everything that you stand for!" It never happens all of a sudden, but it has happened in the past in other churches, and it can happen here. How can we keep it from happening? Three ways:

- 1) By continual prayer.
- 2) By continuing to teach the Word.
- 3) By making sure, by God's grace, that the Word of God not only reaches the ears of people, but that it finds a home in every heart.

That is why this text is so very important, and why each of us needs to give the Word top priority in our hearts. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Get it in your heart, and keep it there — not just on your table.

THE INSPIRED AND PROFITABLE WORD

2 Timothy 3:14-17

Intro: I doubt if anyone would disagree with me when I say that 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 is the classic passage in all of Scripture describing for us the nature of the Word of God, and its importance. By classic passage I mean the most important verses of all of the verses in the Bible which describe for us what the Bible is, as well as its purpose, or purposes. There are many Scriptures which support it, but none which surpasses it. Every Christian needs to know these verses and to understand what they mean.

Let me begin tonight by asking and answering a question:

I. WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT THE BIBLE?

Or, I could ask the question this way: How did we get this Book we call the Scriptures, or the Bible?

Many of us have grown up with the Bible, and it is easy for us to forget what a unique book this is. You and I do not have another book in our homes like it, nor do we have any that can surpass it. It is the Word of God! As verse 16 tells us, it is God-breathed. That is, God so controlled and directed each writer in his writing that it was as though God told them every word to write. And yet we know that it was not exactly that way because we can see the character of the writers, and their understanding of the truth, in the books which they have written. Even in the world it used to be that you were not considered really educated until you had a considerable knowledge of the Bible. Unfortunately that day is past, and now those who believe the Bible are looked upon with pity by the people of the world. But that does not keep this book from being the Word of God. It continues to be, and always will be, the Word of God.

Paul spoke of the Bible as the Scriptures because he was speaking of special books which had been written. Timothy knew that Paul was speaking primarily of the Old Testament, but there evidently also was some knowledge among the Lord's people that a New Testament was in the making. I say that in part because of a statement which Peter made in his second epistle regarding the epistles of Paul. This is what he said:

And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;

As also in all epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood,

which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest,
as they do also the other scriptures,
 unto their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:15, 16).

Note that Peter placed Paul's epistles in the same category as the scriptures of the OT. And so now we are doing the right thing when we include the NT with the OT and call them all, the Scriptures. They are all the Word of God. They are all God-breathed. They are all infallible, that is, incapable of containing any error, and they are unchanging. We may try to bring the language up-to-date, but we dare not change the content of the Bible.

And so now we can say that verses 16 and 17 apply, not just to the OT, but to the NT as well, and place the stamp of divine authority upon every book of the Bible.

This is why the Apostle Paul was so elated when he wrote his first epistle, 1 Thessalonians, and said this in chapter 2, verse 13:

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing,
 because, when ye received the word of God
 which ye heard of us,
 ye received it not as the word of men,
 but as it is in truth, the word of God,
 which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

Paul was writing to a Gentile church. They were people who had been saved out of a false, defiling, God-less religion. But by God's grace when Paul came to Thessalonica with his message, many of the people realized that it was not just some new religion that they had never heard about before, but that it was the Word of God -- and they believed it! They accepted its message. They put their trust in the Savior about Whom the Bible speaks from the first book to the last book!

Paul was so happy about what had happened in Thessalonica that he could keep from thanking God continually for what God had done in the hearts of the Thessalonian believers.

Now for a second question arising out of these four verses at the end of 2 Timothy 3:

II. WHY IS THE BIBLE SO IMPORTANT?

Let me give you three reasons which Paul mentioned to Timothy -- three reasons for the importance of the Scriptures.

A. Because in the Word of God we learn about salvation.

I would like for you to notice those word which Paul used in

verse 15, "the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Going back to what I read to you a moment ago about the believers in Thessalonica, they didn't need the Bible to tell them that there was a god. Nor did they need anyone to tell them that they needed to please their god, or gods. But they did need the Bible to make them "wise unto salvation." When you think about God, and about getting right with God, it is not enough to follow your own ideas, or the ideas that some religious leader may have. This is one place where you can't afford to be wrong. You need the Bible to tell you that you need to be saved, and why you need to be saved, and how you can be saved. You can't go wrong with the Bible because it is God's Book. But if you ignore God's Book, you can't possibly be right. Sincerity is not enough. We need the truth. We need to be made "wise unto salvation," and the only place we can get that wisdom is in the Bible.

But how did it come to Timothy?

See 2 Tim. 1:5. I think that we can safely assume from this that his grandmother told him about the Lord. And his mother told about the Lord. And then the Apostle Paul added a lot to what they had done. But the important thing to notice is that they all gave to young Timothy the Word of God. Paul was evidently referring to all of them when he encouraged Timothy to remember who they were who had told him about the Lord. Timothy could see in all of their lives what the Lord had done for them, and that added to his own conviction that they were telling him the truth.

Who told you about the Lord? With me it was my parents. And I could tell because I lived with them that they believed and were changed by trusting in the Savior that they told me about.

That is a major reason for the importance of the Bible. But let me give you a second reason.

B. The Bible is the book which makes us "perfect."

You see this in verses 16 and 17. (Read.)

What did Paul mean by "perfect"?

Paul was speaking about what the Word of God does to us after we are saved. We learn what we are to believe about God, about Christ, about the Holy Spirit, about prayer, about holiness, about heaven, and on and on. And all of this is "profitable" for us. The Bible is the only place that we can

learn these things, and we need to be careful to see that we can find what people teach us in the Bible. How greatly we are blessed in our knowledge as well as in day to day living when we are learning what is in our Bibles! The Bible re-proves us where we are wrong. It tells us how to make things right. And then it gives us teaching about many things we would never think about concerning a life that is pleasing to God.

Now all of this is designed by God to make us what He wants us to be. Paul spoke to Timothy about "the man of God." And he may have been thinking primarily about Timothy as a servant of the Lord, but it would all apply to every Christian whatever our place of ministry might be.

After we are saved we can expect that the Lord is going to use us just as He used others to bring the Word of God to us. But for this we need the Word. There are plenty of people today who claim to be the Lord's servants, but they know next to nothing, or maybe nothing at all, about what is in this book -- what this Book teaches us that we need to know, and how this Book shows us that we need to live.

The third reason comes out of the first two, showing us the importance of the Word of God.

C. It is the Bible that prepares us to serve the Lord.

Peter tells us that God has given us all things in the Word which have to do with life and godliness. Do you want to know how to live for the Lord? You will find your answer in this Book. But Paul writing to Timothy adds to that. He was saying that if we want to know what it means to serve the Lord, you will find this also in this Book.

How much do you think our churches would be affected in what they are doing if they made sure that all they are doing finds its authority and its examples in the Word of God. If we would drop everything that is not authorized by Scripture, many of our programs would come to a complete halt.

Paul said that Timothy would be fully equipped by the Word of God -- knowing it, believing it, obeying it -- for all that God would ever call upon him to do. We don't need the Word of God plus a lot of modern ideas and methods. I believe with all of my heart that it is just like Dr. Mitchell used to say so often about serving the Lord: "It is the Spirit of God, using the Word of God, through the man of God." That is what Paul was saying to Timothy.

Now for my last point:

III. WHAT DID PAUL WANT TIMOTHY TO DO?

Now get the true picture in your mind. Paul was going to die, and he knew it. He was passing the torch on to Timothy. Timothy was to continue the work which Paul had been doing. And Paul was very obviously deeply concerned about what would happen after he was gone.

So what did he tell him to do? I can answer that question in one word: "Continue."

This is a translation of the Greek verb, to abide, or to remain. Paul said here in this passage that the only place where you need to change is not in what you are preaching, nor in how you are preaching, but Paul said for Timothy to look for changes that the Lord would make in him.

Timothy had started out in the Word of God, and he had been learning the Word and preaching the Word. Now Paul was saying, "Keep on learning more and more about the truth. Turn the light of the Word upon your own life. Accept it when you see you need to change and to improve. Look in the Word to see how those changes are to be made. And then let the Lord show you more and more each day about what He wants you to be. Paul was stating very clearly in this passage that the eternal effectiveness of our work and the extent to which we will glorify God, will be dependent, first of all, upon what God is doing in our lives. If things are right there, He will use us wherever and however He chooses to work.

Concl: This is God's word to me tonight, and this is my word from God to each one of you: "Continue." The Word was used by God for our salvation. He is using the Word for our perfection. And it is the Word, our knowledge of it, and our submission to it, which qualifies to be both faithful and effective servants of the Lord.

I am thankful for all of the people the Lord has used in my life. I have had the privilege of sitting at the feet of some very wonderful men, and women, of God. They have taught me much. And I hope I am still learning. How thankful we should be for the wonderful books which are available to us. But let me say to all of us, myself included, the important thing with all of us from this moment on until we see the Lord is, What am I doing with this precious Book? What am I learning? How is it affecting my life? Am I most concerned about what is pleasing the Lord? Am I thoroughly convinced that God will use the Word to make me His servant?

If you have neglected this Word, then get back to it, and get

started again, and continue. If you have been going on with the Lord, then continue. We don't need any more than we have in the Word and in our Lord Jesus Christ. New ways may easily lead us astray. Stay in the old paths, and learn to do God's work in God's way. That is where the blessing is.

WORSHIP THE LORD
Psalm 96:9

Intro: Years ago I learned that there are five kinds of prayer spoken of in Scripture:

- 1) Worship, or the adoration of God.
- 2) Thanksgiving, or praise to God for blessings received.
- 3) Confession of sins -- things that we have done which we should not have done, or things we should have done but have failed to do.
- 4) Intercession -- prayer for others.
- 5) Petition -- requests for ourselves.

We don't always pray in this order, nor do we always include all of these forms of prayer when we pray, but there is very little doubt but that every Christian engages in all of these forms of prayer from time to time, often without knowing that all prayer falls into one of the five categories.

I do not want to appear to be thinking of prayer in a formal, often cold-hearted manner, because true prayer is the out-pouring of our hearts to God. True prayer is fellowship with God whatever form it may take. Prayer is to be continual in the life of every Christian. It is not that we can always be on our knees before God, but our fellowship with Him is to be uninterrupted.

The one that probably gets most of our attention initially after we are saved is petition. We see our needs as we have never before seen them, and so we pray much seeking the Lord's help and blessing for our lives.

Second in order is probably intercession. We bring the needs of others to the Lord. We pray for the salvation of our loved ones and friends who do not know the Lord. We are conscious of the spiritual needs of people throughout the world, and so we pray for missionaries and pastors we are acquainted with. This is as it should be.

I think that I would place thanksgiving third. We pray before we eat. We thank the Lord for our health, and for His protection over our lives. Most of all are we thankful for our Savior, and for the Word which God used to bring us to Him. Before people are saved they are just thankful, but rarely do you hear people express their thanks to God! A Christian learns that he is to be thankful for all things and in everything, even the trials and testings which come to us all.

The two forms of prayer that are probably the most neglected are the confession of sins and worship. Perhaps the reason for this is because of the tendency we all seem to have to be

rather shallow in our relationship with God. Isaiah 6 certainly teaches us that the closer we get to the Lord the more we become conscious of our own sinfulness and unworthiness, and the more we realize how infinitely holy God is. This in turn brings us to confession, and leads us to understand more about what it means to worship God.

Tonight I want us to think about worship. The Bible has much to say about worship. Worship is a theme which runs in the Bible from Genesis to the Revelation. It is a subject about which we learn more and more as long as we live. One thing about worship is clear from Scripture, and that is that God desires our worship. This is really the highest form of prayer; it is tragic that it is so neglected.

Everything about worship is important -- the place, the words we use, the way we express our worship, such as, in song, in giving, in service. However, it is unfortunate that the place and the forms of worship seem to become the major things to many people. We forget what the Lord told the woman of Samaria when He talked with her while He was waiting for His disciples to return from the city of Samaria to buy food. As the Lord talked to her about water, and as He revealed that He knew all about her unfortunate marriages, whether out of embarrassment or in a sincere desire to know the truth, she introduced the subject of the place of worship. To her comments about where the proper place of worship was, the Lord responded by saying,

But the hour cometh, and now is,
when the true worshippers shall worship
the Father in spirit and in truth:
for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

God is a Spirit: and they that worship him
must worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

The Father is seeking worshipers, but not just any kind of worship. He is seeking those who will worship Him "in spirit and truth."

Much has been said and written about those words, "spirit and truth." We know that the Holy Spirit directs us in true worship, and we know that the only real place that we can learn about worship, is in the Bible. But I doubt if this is what the Lord meant when He was speaking to the woman of Samaria. Instead, it seems to me that He was telling her that neither the place, nor the form of worship, is the most important. Instead, without going into a lot of detail, it seems to me that the Lord was telling the woman that worship must be genuine ("in spirit"), and that it must be prompted by a true understanding, limited though it may be, of God Himself.

That word "must" is important. The Lord was not saying that any kind of worship from any kind of a person, is what the Lord wants. He wants worship from a heart filled with love and adoration, and with some understanding of the glory and majesty of God. So we don't determine what true worship is; God does! And no other worship is acceptable to God.

Now for God to be actively seeking worshipers (and we would need to understand that He meant from His people), then this means that this is one thing that the Lord will always seeking to teach us: HOW TO WORSHIP HIM. This is really the highest form of prayer and that which should give us the greatest delight. When the worshiper is right with God, then worship in its many forms can be pleasing to God.

In Paul's letter to the Philippians he described believers with these words found in Phil. 3:3:

For we are the circumcision,
which worship God in the spirit
[probably the Holy Spirit],
and rejoice in Christ Jesus,
and have no confidence in the flesh.

One of the best places to learn how to worship is the Psalms -- undoubtedly the best. And tonight I want to take you to Psalm 96, verse 9, to see what David wrote, and then see what we can learn from the Psalm about worship.

You find this verse in 1 Chronicles 16:29 where the indication is that Psalm 96 was written by David to celebrate the bringing of the ark of the covenant into the city of David. It was a time of great rejoicing, but David made it a time in which the people were called to worship the Lord.

The statement we are going to be looking at is found also in Psa. 29:2, but we will leave that Psalm for another time.

(Read Psa. 96:9.)

Notice first if you will that:

I. WORSHIP IS A DIVINE OBLIGATION WHICH IS PLACED UPON US.

David not only gives this as a command, but he wrapped it up, so to speak, in a plea. "O worship the Lord..." The Hebrew simply says, "Worship the Lord," but I believe that our the translators captured the urgency which was in the heart of David. He was addressing the people in the same spirit in which he was worshipping the Lord. In fact, he was calling upon the whole earth to join in worshipping the Lord.

The word worship itself conveys the idea of bowing down before the Lord, or falling prostrate before Him in humility and recognition of His great glory and power. You and I will never be in the presence of a person who in any way compares with our God -- which includes also our Lord and the Holy Spirit. But the emphasis here seems to be upon the Father.

I don't know all that is involved in the coming glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, but worship will be the attitude when as Paul told the Philippians that "every knee shall bow..." What a day that will be!

But let me point out another obvious point in this verse, but which needs more emphasis than I have already given it.

II. OUR WORSHIP HAS "THE LORD" AS ITS OBJECT.

This is Jehovah! He is the ever-living, never-changing, sovereign God of heaven and earth. When our hearts are taken up with Him, we won't worry about the place, and the words we use will vary from time to time, but we will be so taken up with Him, that He will be the object of all that we do.

Notice how this is brought out in Psalm 96.

He is to be the object of our singing. Was He with you tonight? Did you sing to the Lord? Even if you can't carry a tune, it is music to Him if it comes from your heart. Three times David said, "Sing."

Secondly, we worship the Lord when we "shew forth His salvation from day to day." Cf. v. 2b.

Years ago when I was a young person, I heard a leader of young people who told us that the Lord does not just want us to have devotional times; He wants us to live devotional lives! That was new to me at the time. David would say the same thing about worship. If we are living for the Lord, seeking to please Him, our very lives are worship!

But then notice as we continue in the Psalm from verse 3 down through the first part of verse 8, King David was concerned with the character of God. (Read.)

This is what Bishop Westcott had in mind when he said that if we are to worship God "in truth," we need to know something about the God we are worshipping. Learning the attributes of God which we have been hearing about today, is excellent preparation for worship, and a wonderful way to continue our worship.

Then look at the latter part of verse 8.

Do you know that you can worship the Lord when you give to Him? While I don't know what any of you give to the Lord, yet I feel sure that most of you give, and many of you give generously. The Lord has abundantly met our needs since He began this ministry. But, you know, it is so easy for us to give regularly without ever thinking of what this means to the Lord, or what we should want it to mean to the Lord. David did not hesitate to say, "Bring an offering," not just to the temple, or to church, but to the Lord.

Cf. Heb. 13:15, 16, "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually..."

Do you know what it means "to communicate"? It means to give. this is a part of our worship.

Read the rest of the Psalm and you will see how it supports what we have already learned about worship.

But there is one more thing that I have to point out. I still have not gotten to those words, "in the beauty of holiness."

III. WE ARE TO WORSHIP THE LORD "IN THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS."

This is the part which we cannot afford to overlook. The one thing which renders our worship acceptable to God is that it is done "in the beauty of holiness."

I believe that when we come to church we ought to be dressed like we expected to be with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is also our heavenly Father. And we know that the only way we can possibly approach a holy God is through our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He has opened a new and living way into the Holiest of all for each one of us who believes. But what do you wear when you go to worship God -- whether it be privately in your home, or around the family table, or at church, or at any time when we are with a Christian friend, or a group of friends?

The NASB translates this expression, in holy attire. But I don't think that quite does justice to the expression. It speaks of holiness, to be sure, but pictures holiness as that which is an ornament of beauty and splendor to God.

You see our worship delights God the most when we come not only in Christ, but like Christ. And the more we are like Christ, the more holy we will be.

One of the great purposes of worship is to make us more like the Lord Jesus. I go before God in His merit, but I need to go before God dressed in the holiness of Christ which makes us acceptable to God and causes Him to delight in our worship.

Concl: In conclusion, let me point out one other aspect of this Psalm on worship.

Have you noticed how not only world-wide, but universe-wide this Psalm is?

When you were first saved, do you remember how you wished that all of your friends and all people everywhere knew the Lord? You found such joy in Him that you wanted everybody to have what you have in Christ.

David felt the same way about worship. He obviously delighted in worshipping God. It was the joy of all joys to him to know that his whole life could be one long act of worshipping God. But he was not content with that! He had such joy in the Lord that he wanted everybody in the whole earth to experience the joy that he found in worshipping the Lord.

Look at the following verses: 1, 3, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13. He joyfully anticipated the day when even creation itself would rejoice and worship "before the Lord." Don't ask me how that will be, but you can be sure that it will come about when as the last verse of the last Psalm declares, and everything that hath breath will praise the Lord.

I hope this has given us a greater understanding of what it means to be a Christian. The Christian life is to be a life of worship, every part of it. And we can be sure that this is the one thing that we learn to do on earth which we will continue to do in heaven. We have a glimpse of what is to come in Rev. 7:9-12.

May the Lord be preparing us day by day for that greater day which is yet to come. We need to know now how to worship the Lord in the beautiful garments of the holiness of Christ.

THE CHRISTIAN -- NOW AND WHEN

1 John 2:28-3:3

Intro: In reading over these five verses recently I noticed that the Apostle John, the sole survivor of the apostles, seemed to be drawing a contrast between what a Christian is NOW, and what a Christian is to be doing NOW, with what we can expect WHEN the Lord returns. This really is a bad place for a chapter division because it tends to keep us from seeing the emphasis that the Apostle John was making.

The Apostle John used the word "now" only four times in this epistle -- and two of them are in this passage. You will see it in verse 28 of chapter 2, and then you will see it again in verse 2 of chapter 3. It is possible that the "now" in 2:28 was used in a transitional sense as we sometimes use the word when we are moving from one point to another -- like we would say, "Now it is time for us to leave on the bike trip." We have been getting ready to leave, and the preparations are finished, so we can leave. But there is still the present idea in that word.

I think that is the case here. John was moving ahead in what he was saying, but he was also indicating that "now," at the present time we need to be doing something. The something is, "Abide in Him," that is, abide in Christ.

There is no question about the "now" in 3:2. That definitely is for the present: "Beloved, **now** are we the sons of God." It is not that we need to be, nor that we shall be, but "now" we are!

I have one more point to make along that line, but I will postpone it for the moment.

The second word that I want you to notice is the word "when." It also is used twice, and each time it is connected with the same verb. We have it translated in the KJV, "~~when~~ he shall appear." See it in 2:28, and again in 3:2. The Greek word that John used could be translated if, but the translators have taken another choice which is the right choice, and have translated it, "when." The appearing of the Lord does not depend upon an if, but it is absolutely certain. We know that it is going to take place, but we don't know the time. And so we say, "~~When~~ he shall appear."

Now I hope you will understand my subject, THE CHRISTIAN -- NOW AND WHEN. The Apostle John was speaking of what we are NOW and what we need to do NOW, as compared with what we are going to experience and what we are going to be WHEN the Lord returns.

All right, let us move from the present to the future, so we will start with the word "now."

I. THE CHRISTIAN -- NOW.

There are three things here that the Apostle John emphasized as far as the present is concerned. I am not going to take them in the order they are found in the text, but more in their logical order.

A. "Beloved, **now** are we the sons of God" (1 John 3:2).

The Greek actually says children of God. John was saying that we have been born into the family of God. We are the children of God by the new birth. This is something that is true NOW, not when we die and go to heaven, nor when the Lord comes. We will still be the children of God when that happens, but John's point is that NOW we are God's children. It is important for everyone who has trusted in Christ for salvation to understand this.

The Apostle John made this clear in the writing of his Gospel. Cf. John 1:11-13.

The moment we are saved, we become the children of God -- and we will always be the children of God.

Now this ought to make us think so that we can be sure that the Apostle John was speaking of us. The only reason this is not true of anyone is because they have not been saved. But, if you are saved, do not hesitate for a moment to say with the Apostle John, "Now are we the children of God." Now, at this very moment, you and I are the children of God. We are members of His family.

If this is true, then I hope you feel like the Apostle John felt according to his words in 3:1. We are His children, not because we are worthy to be, but because of the Father's love for us -- and even the Apostle John in his old age found it impossible to describe the love that would make him, or anyone else, a child of God.

And we ought to feel the same way, and more so the older we get and the longer we know our heavenly Father!

This is the first NOW. But let me go on to the second. You will find it in 2:28, as I have already said.

B. "And now, little children, abide in him" (1 John 2:28).

I hope that you might go home tonight and read again what the Lord Jesus said in John 15 about abiding in Him. He used the illustration of a vine and its branches, and indicated that nothing must come between the vine and the branches if there is to be fruit. What was the Lord speaking about?

He was talking about our fellowship with Him. If we are abiding in Christ it means that we are very careful about our fellowship with Him. This is not something that we can afford to neglect a single day because we do not know when the Lord might come. And the Apostle John suggested that it is possible for the Lord to come and to find us not abiding so that the result would be that we would be "ashamed before Him at His coming."

We all need to be careful about anything that would interrupt our fellowship with the Lord. I spoke one night to those on the bike trip about obedience. It is not enough for us to read the Word, and pray. They are very essential. But we need to be doing what the Lord wants us to do.

But let me move on to the third thing that John mentioned as far as NOW is concerned. You will find it in 1 John 3:3:

C. "And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1 John 3:3).

If we know the Lord, and are looking for His return, then we have a job to do. We need to keep our lives free from sin. And our work is not done until we are as pure as our Lord is.

If we are to be pure, then there are certain things that we must do, and other things which we must not do! We need to stay away from people who will get us to do the wrong things, and we need to associate with those who really want to please the Lord. We need to make sure that we are feeding on the Word every day, and seeking the Lord's help in prayer. We need to make the Word our guide for daily living. This would be a good verse for all of us to take as our verse for the coming week. If we do, we will probably keep it for the week after that, and then the week after that, and so on.

Young people, remember. If you are with the wrong kind of people, you are eventually going to be doing the wrong kind of things. Don't submit to peer pressure. Make it your aim every day that your life is going to be pleasing to the Lord. Abide in Christ, and seek to make yourself as pure as Christ is, but remember that you can't do it without Him. Cf. 1 John 2:29.

Now this gives us a lot to think about for the present,

doesn't it? These things have to do with our NOW.

Now let us go on to think about:

II. THE CHRISTIAN -- WHEN.

The first is in verse 28 of chapter 2:

- A. "That we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 John 2:28).

"Confidence" is both boldness and assurance. Just what it all means that we can be "ashamed before Him at His coming," I don't know. But I know that it is possible or the Apostle John would never have said so.

You see, what we do NOW determines how we are going to feel WHEN our Lord comes. If we could only realize this, what a difference it would make in our behavior. What if we are someplace that is displeasing to the Lord when He comes. What if we are doing something or saying something that we will be ashamed of if the Lord comes right at that moment. What if we have not been reading our Bibles, not been praying, going to church with a bad attitude, and the Lord comes? We don't know when the Lord is going to come. It will be a lot worse than it was when we were children and our folks came home to find us doing things that they had told us not to do.

This is the warning. I hope that all of us will pay attention to it, and make the necessary changes in our lives which need to be made.

But now let me give you the other WHEN.

- B. "And it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, ~~when~~ he shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

The Apostle John was saying that we know, and yet we don't know the full meaning of the statement that "we shall be like Him." Here was a man who had walked with the Lord longer than any of the other apostles. His own brother was martyred early in his ministry. But John had outlived all of them, and here we find him saying that there were some things, very precious to him, which he did not fully understand.

I am not going to assume that I know what the Apostle John did not know, but from his words I would assume that being with the Lord, and being like Him is going to be so far more

wonderful than we can imagine, that it is impossible for us to comprehend the glory of it all.

This is our hope -- to be like Christ! But, you see, we are not to wait for that change to take place when the Lord comes. It must be taking place NOW -- gradually, day by day.

Concl: The WHEN of our lives is yet future. We are waiting for the Lord to return, but He hasn't come yet. But He is coming! In the light of that glorious hope we need to think about what we are doing NOW.

Are you abiding in Christ? Are you purifying yourself? If not, you should be. Are you living in such a way that you are demonstrating to the world what it means to be a child of God?

I hope that starting tonight these two words will mean something very important to you -- NOW and WHEN. The Apostle John in these five verses has given us a very clear picture of the way you and I should be living. If we are living as he has told us to live, then we can be sure that we will be looking forward with greater anticipation to that glorious day WHEN our Lord shall come.