

SATAN AND HIS IFS OF MISLEADING SPLENDOR

SATAN AND HIS "IFS" OF MISLEADING SPLENDOR

"And Jesus beingfi~ll of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered" (Utie 4:1-2).

Throughout His stay upon the earth, the Savior was penranenfly full of the Holy Spirit, and that explained two things: (1) His continuing victory over evil; and (2) Satan's never-ceasing assault upon Christ's holiness. The only assured method of living victoriously is to be completely possessed and controlled by God.

The Continuing Assault... How Fierce

When discussing the temptation of Christ, theologians draw attention to the three main suggestions made by Satan. Yet, it must be remembered the Savior had already endured forty days of unprecedented anguish. The details of that month-long struggle were never revealed, but it may be assumed the conflict was severe. Then, when the struggle had apparently ended, Satan attacked the physical weakness of Jesus. The Lord had been without a substantial meal for weeks, and fasting must have had an effect upon His physical condition. He needed nourishment, and since there was no store in the area, the Devil tried to trick Jesus into the sin of seffishness. He said, "If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread" (4:3). It would not have been sinful to partake of legitimate food, but it would have been wrong to yield to any suggestion of the Devil. To place self-satisfaction before obedience to the laws of God would have been a mistake. Throughout temptations Satan's insinuations were false and misleading. He said, "If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine" (4:7). His nefarious suggestions questioned the authority and integrity of the Savior. Satan offers many attractive things, but the price is always too great to pay. He offered the prodigal son a glorious time in a foreign land, but the unfortunate young man ultimately stole pigs' food in order to survive. The Devil always takes away far more than he gives.

The Complete Answer... How Faithfi~l

Each time Christ was tempted by the Devil, He prefaced His reply with the same statement, "It is wriflen." It became increasingly evident that Jesus knew the Scriptures intimately and was deter

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mined not to do anything contrary to the will of His Father. Perhaps it was possible to give to Jesus all the kingdoms of the world; that is, Satan could have withdrawn opposition in every country. Apparently he was offering a shortcut to world domination. He suggested an easy way to give the Lord what He most desired. Yet Christ knew "the longest way around is the shortest way home!" The complete and final answer to temptation is conformity to the will of God.

The Commanding Assurance... How Firm

Many people are still deceived by the prince of evil. They believe his offers to be charming, alluring and satisfying. The subtle attractions of soft lights and sweet music have lured unsuspecting victims to their doom. It is wise to study carefully any person who suggests walking on thin ice! To change the image, it is better to build an insignificant cottage on solid rock, than to erect a glittering

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palace on shifting sand! The Lord was the Creator of the universe, but He also appreciated common sense! He came to earth, not as the Everlasting Father, but as a man subject to the laws of men. Had He jumped unwisely from the pinnacle of the temple, His body would have been broken by the rocks upon which He fell. That tragedy would have prevented the establishment of the kingdom of God. It was true that David had written, "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways" (Ps. 91:11), but the angels were never commissioned to protect people whose actions were self-destructive. Some of the most attractive plants in the world emit poison. Contact with poison ivy can be dangerous, and the identical truth is evident with everything connected with Satan's attractive offers. They ruin happiness and destroy human souls.

Young people should be aware of the false promises of evil. Drugs offer the possibility of riding high but leave an addict in the lowest depths of suffering and shame. The praise and company of other addicts offer gaiety but leave the soul utterly lonely and desiring suicide. A fence at the top of a cliff is better than an ambulance at the bottom. The Bible says that Satan is a liar, and that conclusion is a fair assessment of his character. His offers are poison pills coated with sugar! The Lord knew this and acted accordingly.

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CHRIST AND HIS "IF" OF SUSTAINED SERVICE

"in the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst let him come unto me, and drink He that believeth on out of his belly (inner man) shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37-38).

The day was hot and sultry. The people in the crowded streets of Jerusalem were restless and terribly thirsty. The services in the temple had been long and demanding, and all the visitors were anticipating the opportunity to return to their distant homes. Suddenly a voice echoed down the street, "Are you thirsty?" That seemingly simple question astounded everybody. Water was almost unobtainable~throats remained dry and lips were parched. The cry was repeated with an invitation, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink" When the listeners converged on a street corner, they saw Jesus, but He had no water skins from which they could drink. Doubtless some of the people were disappointed and critical, but many years later John explained that incident He wrote, "But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive" (John 7:39). Evidently it was only after a long period of time John and the other disciples understood the significance of Christ's statement.

The Great Requirement... 'IfAny Man Thirst'

This was not a momentary, emotional idea They were thirsty. Their throats burned, and their tongues were dry. The dusty, desert-like conditions were appalling. They desperately needed to drink. David would have understood the situation, for he wrote, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul alter thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night" (Ps. 42:1-3). He had watched the graceful deer going to drink at the stream~ When drought ravaged the land, he had seen their tongues

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protruding as if every fiber of their beings yearned for water. They seemed to be saying, "If we do not find water, we shall die!" Some religious people know little, if anything, of this desperate longing of the soul. Complacently, they remain content with an occasional Sunday morning visit to the church reservoir. The psalmist said, "Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart" (Ps. 119:2).

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The Glorious Response Let Him Come unto Me and Drink"

"He that believeth (rests, depends) on me, out of his inmost being, shall flow rivers of living water." Many years later when John wrote his gospel, he realized the Savior was thinking of the world which resembled a desert. It desperately needed the living water, clear as crystal, which proceeds from the throne of God and of the Lamb (see Rev. 22:1). Yet water had to be conveyed through special channels. Only irrigation ditches could carry supplies to the places of need. John recognized that the living water from heaven would have to be carried by specially prepared people. Those channels would need to be consecrated men and women who depended upon the Savior. John knew such workers. He wrote of those who "for his name's sake went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles" (see 3 John 7).

The Gentle Rivers Rivers of living Water"

At first Jesus invited people to drink, but there was a vast difference between a drink and a river! Perhaps He was urging them to drink often or indicating that His amazing power could transform little into much! Rivers must have a constant source of supply, or they will dry up. Even pools would evaporate in desert conditions at midday. The Lord was enunciating the simple fact that if His followers maintained a constant thirst for His fullness, unfailing resources would transform the wilderness into a garden through them.

Yet nothing would be accomplished unless the Master and His men worked together. If they would do their part, He would do His. Jesus appeared to be suggesting that unless His disciples drank often from God's supplies, they would have nothing to give to others. Unfortunately, all Christian workers know the feeling of resembling a squeezed-out orange! Pastors who have nothing left to give to their congregations, should re-establish contact with God's eternal fountain. It must never be forgotten that as barren earth awaits the arrival of life-giving rain, so men and women await the soul-refreshing gift which only God can supply. If we are to become His irrigation ditches, we should remove all debris from the channels. Ditches never clean out themselves!

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MARTHA AND THE "W" THAT OPENED
GOD'S TREASURY

"Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, thou, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?" (John 11:40).

The writer to the Hebrews expressed one of the greatest spiritual truths when he wrote, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is

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a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6). Faith is the key that unlocks the treasure house of heaven. God likes to be believed! Nevertheless, men forget this fact, and continually seek for visible evidence as a prelude to believing. It was significant that when the Savior reminded Martha, He said, "If thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God." Faith led to special blessings. Yet when the Lord was nailed to His cross, the chief priests said, "Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross that we may see and believe" (Mark 15:32). Men seek signs; God desires faith, a faith which tenaciously clings to His promises.

The People Who Requested

"The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven. He an-

swered and said unto them, ... A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas" (MatL 16: 1~). People asked the Lord to show them a sign from heaven when every day, He healed the sick and performed unprecedented miracles. The blind were being made to see; the lame walked; the lepers were cleansed, and the dead were being raised. Homes were transformed, and people were discovering Christ solved all kinds of problems.

Yet the Pharisees and Sadducees requested a sign from heaven. They were not blind. They chose not to see! Furthermore, had the Lord granted their desire, they would have repeated their request. They would not have been satisfied with one or two or any number of miracles. The petition would have been repeated daily. Human nature has not changed. The most effective way to fill an auditorium is to advertise healing services. People who seldom attend a religious service hurry to such meetings to see something sensational.

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The Person Who Remembered

It is interesting to note that when Luke wrote about the rich man and laarus, he did not describe a parable! He wrote, "There was a certain rich man.... Elsewhere the Lord's illustrations were cited as parables, but on this occasion Christ described something which had really happened. The Lord supplied a glimpse into the hereafter when He mentioned a rich man who had been unable to take his wealth into eternity. When that person discovered there was no comfort beyond the grave, he made a request that Lazarus be sent to earth to warn his brothers, "lest they also come into this place of torment Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:2831). Evidently the deceased man still believed signs were more necessary than faith.

The Preacher Who Rejected

It was sad that Thomas, who knew so much, understood so little! He had traversed the highways and byways of Palestine announcing the kingdom of God was at hand. He had followed his Master for three years, but faith did not occupy a central place in his life. When he heard of the resurrection of the Lord, he said, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe" (John

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20:25). Later, "Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (20:29). "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen (Heb. 11:1).

"And [Jesus] said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith? (Mark 4:40). "And He saith unto them, Why are ye fearful? O ye of little faith" (Matt. 8:26). "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Matt. 8:10).

Simply trusting every day,
Trusting through a stormy way:
Even when my faith is small,
Trusting Jesus, that is all.

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THE SAVIOR... AND HIS "IF" OF FRUITBEARING

"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing, ... If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:5, 7).

Apart from special circumstances, fruit must be cultivated, and the greatness of the harvest is commensurate with the amount of effort expended by the cultivator. Crops can easily be ruined, and wise farmers are familiar with certain indispensable conditions. The Lord had this thought in mind when He mentioned His if of fruit-bearing. It was significant that He spoke of fruit, more fruit, and much fruit. All the stages of fruitbearing were dependent upon the conditional word if

The Indisputable Productivity

A fruitless Christian is a person who never produces the characteristics mentioned by Paul (see Gal. 5:22-23). Fruitlessness may be caused by several things: (1) An unused fertilizer. Fertilizers left in the barn never improve unproductive soil. Similarly, the rich provision made by the Lord is useless unless individuals appropriate it to themselves. All Christians should desire to bring forth a harvest for

the glory of God; (2) An unrelenting freeze. The lack of rain or very low temperatures can ruin any harvest. If a man or woman permits the soul to become fligid and cold, spiritual fruitbearing becomes impossible; (3) An unchallenged foe. If the Mediterranean fruit fly had been permitted to remain in California, economic disaster would have paralyzed the state. When enemies attack the soul, every effort must be made to exterminate them; (4) An unwise farmer. Solomon wrote, "I went by the field of the slothful . . . and lo, it was all grown over with thorns.... Then I saw, and considered it well ... Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep; so shall thy poverty come" (Prov. 24:30-34). To avoid these calamities, men must abide in Christ that His life can flow through the human branches.

The Inspired Prayer

The Lord said, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). The initial word {indicates answers to prayer are conditional upon

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a believer abiding in Christ If a person does not do this, he or she has no right to expect affirmative responses to a petition. James wrote, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3). Prayers can be selfishly motivated. Every prayer of Jesus was answered for He never sought anything which was wrong. Increased fruitbearing is only possible when Christians abide in the will of God. The flow of sap from the parent tree must be unhindered; otherwise, the fruit will be undeveloped, tasteless, small and unsatisfying.

me Increased Pleasure

The Lord said, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15: 1-11). These marvelous utterances were preceded by that conditional conjunction If we abide in Christ, we bear fruit If we abide in Him, we receive answers to prayer. If we abide in Him, our happiness increases, and our "joy will be full." The Christian who does not abide in Christ is like a stunted tree, a useless piece of timber, a blight in an orchard, and a disappointment to its owner. People whose petitions are not granted never experience the joy of seeing miracles; inspiration never thrills their souls.

The psalmist described such people when he wrote, "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (see Ps. 137: 1-t). People who do not abide in the will of God live in a Babylon of their own creation. A man who is not helpful to his Master is haunted by his memories! Babylonian fruit could never be compared with the fruit of the Hebrew homeland. It is better to be inspired by abiding in Christ than to just exist in any other place.

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JAMES AND HIS "IF" OF HEALING AND FORGIVENESS

"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church: and let them pray over him anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of the elders shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him" (James 5:1-5).

This is one of the most challenging statements in the New Testament. James was the chairman of the Jerusalem elders, and matters of jurisprudence were referred to him. Occasionally, he was required to solve problems which affected all the churches. The word if occupied a central part in this Scripture and was used to differentiate between the healing of the body and the forgiveness of the soul. During the history of the church leaders disagreed and assemblies were divided. Sometimes calm consideration yields better results than emotional debates.

Proposition One... Sickness Is Not Always the Result of Secret Sin

All sickness is the result of Adam's sin, but to suggest illness is

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evidence of a person's secret guilt is erroneous. Sometimes this has been true. For example, four men brought their friend to Jesus in quest of healing. The Lord dealt with the sickness in the soul and

then healed the man's body (see Luke 5:18-26). Yet, this could not have been the reason for the illness of Trophimus whom Paul left at Melitum (see 2 Tim. 4:20). The apostle who often healed the sick could have handled that situation immediately. Probably the man needed rest, but the only way to supply this was to put him in bed! James supplied guidance for many churches and in connection with the healing of the sick, said: "If he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him"

Proposition Two. . . The Text Cannot Mean What Some Teachers Claim

The apostle suggested that any sick person should share his problem with the elders of the local church who would reciprocate by anointing the sufferer with oil; their prayer of faith would provide a miracle. It should never be forgotten that this advice is still relevant. God can, and does heal the sick Nevertheless, that promise is not a blank check on the bank of God's sufficiency. All healing is subject to the will of God. When people demand that God heal the sick,

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they are either over-confident or arrogant. If God must do as He is requested, then Christians would never need a doctor nor an undertaker. They should be able at any age-fifty, sixty, or even a hundred years-to do as James suggested, and healing would be instantaneous. Christians would live forever as long as the elders of the church responded to their requests!

The arrogant person bays, "Lord, You must heal me!" The humble person says, "Lord, I know You can do it, but I am not worthy that You should." The person of faith says, "Lord, I am trusting to find favor in Thy sight. Yet, not my will but Thine be done. If it will please Thee, heal my body." "And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up.

Proposition A Man May Be Sick in Several Ways

It is possible to be sick in soul, body, and mind. A body may be wracked with pain, a soul tormented by guilt, or a mind partially or completely deranged. James would agree that healing covered every area of human experience. God can and does heal sick bodies; He certainly saves the soul, and fills the mind with peace beyond understanding. Nevertheless, that kind of faith is found only in humble souls who never demand responses from the "giver of every good and perfect gift." They prefer, reverently, to seek His gracious cooperation. If and when, for reasons best known to Himself, God temporarily withholds assistance, true faith never seeks someone to blame for the resulting disappointment.

Many years ago I met a young Christian who was seriously ill, but she never requested other Christians to anoint her body with oil nor pray for her physical recovery. She had no desire to be healed. She loved her Savior immensely and desperately desired to be in His presence. "For [she] looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10). At that time I was a young pastor and serving the Lord was of paramount importance to me. Why anyone should desire to die was completely beyond my comprehension. Now I know what that young lady and Paul believed. "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better?" (Phil. 1:23).

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PETER AND HIS "IF" OF A RESPLENDENT
HOME<;OING

"For if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:10-11).

Simon Peter had strong convictions! He believed a man's faith would provide an entrance into heaven, but only conformity to the will of God could provide an abundant entrance. During my stay in Melbourne, Australia, I stood on a high vantage point and watched the homecoming parade of soldiers who had survived a terrible ambush in the Korean War. They were all that remained of the First Australian Division which went to fight in that conflict. I was unaware of what was taking place until a stranger said, "What is left of that company came home last night, and in a few minutes they will place a wreath on the national cenotaph. They will do this in memory of their comrades who did not come home. We are here to give them a great welcome."

I was enthralled as I watched the proceedings. First came the police motorcyclists to make sure the street was cleared of traffic; then came the mounted police on their magnificent horses, and after the military band came those gallant men. Suddenly, pandemonium

broke loose as hundreds of young women ran to the marching soldiers to kiss and hug them while the immense crowd continued to cheer. The men had performed valiantly on the field of battle, and were receiving an abundant welcome into their homeland.

As a vivid contrast, I remembered my entry into Australia when an ill-tempered customs officer temporarily made my life a misery. He made me open all my luggage and asked all kinds of questions. When he had finished the examination, I felt extremely fortunate even to set foot in the country. Peter would have understood!

Continually Striving... To Improve

Peter thought there was always room for improvement. He believed that however close to his Master a Christian might be, it was always possible to get closer. Peter would have made a great collector of precious things; he was always adding to what he possessed. He began with faith in the precious blood of Christ but then went on to deeper experiences. He wrote of adding virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly love, kindness, and charity

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(see 2 Peter 1:5-7). It would be easy to visualize his meeting with people camped on the lower elevations of God's mountain of grace. Having heard their testimony, he would urge them to break camp and renew their climb toward the summit. Grace leads to godliness; happiness should forerun holiness, and salvation should be an introduction to service. These were lessons to be learned prior to graduation in God's academy. Peter emphasized these facts, saying, "If ye do these things, ye shall never fall." He was not content to see men and women enlisting in the army of the Lord; he wanted them to be enrolled in the Officers' Training Company! Those who had been

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taught by others should prepare to instruct new recruits. Promotion was not automatic; it had to be earned

Constant Never Falling

Peter never forgot that he had denied his Lord, but he knew that could not have happened if he had done what he was now recommending to his readers. He had not given much attention to what the Lord had spoken, and his negligence nearly ruined his soul. "Ye shall never fall" meant the climber had reached a higher altitude where he was in good company for his heavenly guide was also on that plateau. The recruit had become a seasoned veteran. The Commander in Chief had seen and approved of His soldier. The joy of complete victory was already thrilling the soul of the aspiring Christian. His medal of merit was already assigned—even before the journey was completed.

Complete Serenity... An Abundant Entrance

That Peter prefaced his message with the conditional if signified not every soldier would become a general! An abundant entrance into the homeland depended on the quality of service rendered on the battlefields of earth. Every soldier would reach the eternal city, but some would arrive almost unnoticed! All would be able to respond when "the roll is called up yonder," but not everyone would be called to the front of the assembled witnesses to be awarded the medal of honor and listen to the plaudits of angelic hosts. Peter emphasized that such a celebration would only be known if the readers of his epistle did what he advised. "If ye do these things," the final result will be assured. Christians should aim high! If they shot at a tree, they would hit their target. If they aimed at the sky, they might even surprise themselves!

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JOHN AND HIS "IF" OF CONTINUOUS CLEANSING

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

It is believed that John lived to be over ninety years of age and during his lifetime saw many changes within the church. False teachers had assumed leadership. Their arrogance was unpardonable, and their doctrines were contrary to the teachings of the Savior. They said that since the death of Jesus obtained unconditional pardon for the sinner, human responsibility had terminated; believers could do as they pleased! There was no need to worry about anything; the blood of Christ had obtained unlimited freedom for mankind. They taught that since eternal life could never be lost, sin was no longer a threat. There was no need for doctrines of holiness. John rebuked this heresy and sent ripples of apprehension throughout the assemblies.

The "If" of Folly

"If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth" (1 John 1:6). "If we say that we

have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1:10). John used the conditional word if six times in as many verses. Evidently, he believed deeds were more important than declarations. What a man was superseded anything he uttered. Unless testimony were based upon the Word of

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God, profession was an empty shell, a house built on shifting sand. That was folly of the greatest magnitude which placed the sinner in danger.

The "If' of Fellowship

John spoke of fellowship, but the text might have a twofold interpretation. It is possible to fellowship with God and with others who share that delightful experience. It is the best cure for loneliness, but John insisted the privilege was conditional. Two men may walk together and argue every step of their journey. That is not fellowship. People may converse on the telephone, but that also is hardly fellowship. A telephone conversation can never be an effective substitute for the beholding of a loved one's face—the warmth of an embrace and the

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sharing of the love and respect one has for the other. True fellowship means meeting, giving, and sharing. These treasures should be known by all Christians; they ate the spiritual cement which binds together the living stones in the temple of God. As the original disciples walked and talked with their Lord, other believers could know that experience. Through the presence of the Holy Spirit, Christ was still among His people. Nevertheless, unless they walked with Him, fellowship was only a word in their vocabulary!

The "If' of Forgiveness

This was the most trenchant of John's statements. He wrote, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, . . . the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (see 1 John 1:7). The word "cleanseth" is a translation of the Greek word *katharizei* and is a special word expressing the continuous tense of the verb. It literally means, "to go on cleansing." All this is conditional on the word if. The precious blood of Christ does not go on cleansing the Christian unless his confession is followed by walking in the light. Some people ask for pardon, then they return to their sinning as quickly as possible. Does that kind of prayer restore peace to the human soul? If a person is a true Christian, can he or she disregard the commandments of God? A man should never expect forgiveness unless he learns to detest that which defiles his soul.

No ordinance of the church or words of a priest or pastor can be of worth unless a person is determined to "walk in the light as he is in the light." There is a vast difference between sinning and loving sin. Lot lived in Sodom and had no intention of leaving that city. It was only the grace of God which brought him out. When a person surrenders to God, he receives an unconditional pardon; but that is not a license to continue evil ways. When God gives us a clean soul, it becomes our responsibility to keep it clean! When Christ brings us out of the prison of guilt and shame, we should never voluntarily return to its shadows. People who do return cannot appreciate the gravity of evil or the atoning worth of the Savior's death.

Lord Jesus Christ, grow Thou in me,
And all things else recede.
My heart be daily nearer Thee,
From sin be daily freed.

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THE LAODICEAN CHURCH AND
THEIR "IF" OF ADMITTANCE

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"&hold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with me" (Rev. 3:20).

If modern terms may be used to describe the church in Laodicea, it might be described as the pride of its members and the delight of the denomination to which it belonged. Its tall, tapering steeple would be seen from great distances, its ornate frontispiece would be displaying elegance, and the parking lot would be filled with Continentals and Cadillacs! All the members would be citizens of note, occupying positions of trust and eminence. The minister would possess the highest academic distinction, and the choir would be filled with professional singers. Everything money could buy would be evident throughout the beautiful building. Yet in the narthex would be a missionary box, and over its coin slot would be a thick cobweb! An artist painted such a picture, and depicted the Savior, hand poised in mid-air, about to seek admittance. When the Lord sent a letter to that church, He reminded the members that in spite of His disappointment, He still sought an entrance. If a person would open the door-so it must have been close-He would be delighted to

accept an invitation to dine.

A Closed Door That Might Have Been Opened (Genesis 7:16)

The ancient world had never known such excitement; it seemed a circus had arrived in town! Unattended animals had been converging on a district where a strange old man had built the world's first ship. It was all so confusing, but the situation was hilarious! The sound of hammers and saws had long since become part of the daily routine. The noise only ceased when the master carpenter became a preacher. This type of thing had continued for one hundred and twenty years, and the people were a little tired of the same sermon. Noah insisted that a great flood was coming, that he would not need to move his vessel to a beach. That pesky old preacher was annoying his audience, for he had become a meddler! When he denounced their illicit conduct, they were incensed. But he was old and harmless, and at least his animals were interesting.

Then events suddenly changed. The ship was completed, and Noah began loading his freight. It was so funny, for that ship was

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going nowhere! The neighbors watched Noah and his family going aboard and probably wished him bon voyage. It was surprising when the great door closed of its own accord! "And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him; and the Lord shut him in" (Gen. 7:16). The Bible says, "And it came to pass after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth" (Gen. 7:10). Why did God wait a week when the ship was ready to begin its journey? The answer may be expressed in one word--race-ior if any man had knocked in faith upon that door, he would have been admitted

A Closed Door That Never Opened (Matthew 25:10)

The Lord was a great preacher; when He described scenes, His word pictures were vivid. Ten young ladies attending a wedding had decided, according to the custom of the times, to go forth to welcome the bridegroom. They were determined to have a great time. Yet something had delayed the husband4obe. They were very tired, and one of their number suggested they should sleep for a short time and take advantage of the delay. "And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet

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him" (Matt. 25:6). Then came problems! Five of the young women had forgotten to bring oil in their containers, and they were desperate. At that late hour the shops would be closed. They would have to awaken a trader! "And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut" (Matt 25:10). That door was never reopened, at least not to them.

A Closed Door That Should Have Been Opened (Revelation 3:20)

Perhaps the minister and his elders were unaware that Jesus was seeking admittance. He who had been on the inside inviting people to enter, was now on the outside. If the people knew this, they could not have cared less. A voice was saying "If any man will open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." They shrugged their shoulders. Who could be bothered with the Man in the street when they were enjoying themselves? Did they ever open that door? If not, it would have been the third occurrence of its type in the Scriptures.

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THE LORD'S PRELUDE TO PAYDAY

"Be thoufaithiul unto death, and I will give thee a crown of hfr" (Rev. 2:10).

This is an age of drop outs, and students are constantly reminded that unless they continue their studies they have no future in modern society. Within the early church the same kind of failure caused concern. Many professing Christians lost their enthusiasm and stopped serving Christ. Persecution, indifference, and other attractions caused this breakdown, and ultimately John was commissioned to send messages to the churches in Asia. It was significant that at the conclusion of each of the seven letters, Christ urged His readers to persevere to the end, to resist becoming a drop out! He mentioned rewards for overcomers and emphasized that those who failed to continue in God's service would have no chance of fame in the kingdom of God. That message is relevant today.

The First Promise... A Special Privilege (Revelation 2:7)

'To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life.' The tree of life was first mentioned in Genesis 3:22 where it was meant to be the channel through which Adam and Eve could have

become immortal. They lost their opportunity and eventually died as sinners. The same tree is mentioned in Revelation 22:2 where its leaves will supply healing for the nations. Since there will be no sin in the eternal ages, the tree of life signifies the way by which mortal beings gain immortality. This special privilege indicates the greatness of God's salvation. "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54).

The Second Promise... A Special Protection (Revelation 2:11)

"He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." Obtaining everlasting life is a great experience, but the promise that it will never be threatened again is greater. At the end of time the dead will appear before the throne of God, and "they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death" (Rev. 20:13-14).

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The Third Promise... A Special Provision (Revelation 2:17)

The text may have connections with the manna stored in the ark of the covenant and with the statement made by Christ, "I am that

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bread of life" (John 6:48). The "white stone" signifies the welcome given into God's country (see the author's book: Bible Treasures, page 161).

The Fourth A Special Power (Revelation 2:26)

"And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations." To exercise authority over nations suggests a special position occupied by God's favored people. It might refer to positions of eminence in our present world, but is more likely a reference to the time when saints reign with Christ. Everlasting life assures believers of a place within the kingdom; the reward of power indicates their importance within that kingdom

The Fifth A Special Profession (Revelation 3:5)

Once again the Lord gave a threefold promise. His faithful servants would be clothed in righteousness; their name will never be erased from the Book of life; and best of all, they will be honored before God and angels. It would be significant to be recognized by any king or queen, yet, that would fade into insignificance when compared with the recognition promised by the King of Kings.

The Sixth Promise... A Special Pillar (Revelation 3:12)

This utterance indicates tremendous importance within the New Jerusalem, the city which will descend from heaven. The Lord will be thrilled to be identified with His faithful servants. This means fellowship of the best kind. "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God... I will write upon him my new name.

The Seventh Promise... A Special Place (Revelation 3:21)

"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne." This was the last of seven rewards promised to those who became overcomers. It is impossible to assess the loss of drop outs. Writing to the Galatians, Paul said, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you? .. Ye did run well; who did hinder you?" (Gal. 3:1; 5:7). At the end of his life on earth, the apostle was able to write, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown" (2 Tim. 4:78). Every Christian should be able to give an identical testimony when he goes to meet the Lord.

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