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The Behold's of Christ's Birth

BY AL SANDERS

One of the most interesting words of Scripture recurs frequently when we consider events surrounding the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. I'm referring to the familiar injunction and invitation, "Behold." Most of us can remember the old railroad crossing signs which carried three words of indelible warning, "Stop, Look, and Listen." In a sense, this is an excellent modern-day translation of the effective "behold" from God's Word. The Holy Spirit has seen to it whenever "behold" is used, He means for us to pause and marvel carefully at the supernatural involvement of God Almighty in the course of human events.

The primary example of the word "Behold" is found in the seventh chapter of Isaiah, verse 14. Here we're told as a result of the weariness of individuals amid world conditions, "Therefore, the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel." This prophetic fulfillment had its realization in Matthew 1:23 where we read the similar words, "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which, being interpreted, is God with us."

This first "Behold," shows supernatural intervention. Never before, and never since, has anything of this type taken place. This innocent maiden, living a devout and holy life before the Lord, was selected by God to be the human instrument through which His own eternal begotten Son would take up residence in human form.

We read in our newspapers a great deal about modern discoveries, and tremendous advancements in the world of science. But at no time has anyone been able to achieve this miraculous situation. Without the inducement of a male sperm, a virgin conceives, and delivers a child.

The second "Behold" in the Christmas narrative is recorded for us by Luke. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he tells how the angel comes to Mary announcing the name of the divine Child who will be born of her. Verse 31 in the first chapter of Luke gives us these words, "And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus." The Old Testament equivalent, of course, is "Joshua." It means "the deliverer." This clearly indicates to us not only supernatural intervention by the Lord but also a completely supernatural conception. Before the holy Child was even born, His definite name was given. Perhaps you, like so many others of us, were in a quandary when it came to the birth of your children. I know my wife and I had a hard time trying to decide what names should be given. This was no problem, however, in the coming of our Saviour. God Almighty gave Him the name by which we shall know Him throughout all eternity.

The third aspect which causes us to pause and marvel carefully is the supernatural submission which we see on the part of Mary. Having been told what would transpire in her body, she rested completely in the confidence of being blessed with Israel's

promise, and the promise which ultimately would bring blessing to the whole world. In verse 38 of Luke 1, we hear her ready response as she testifies, "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."

With this indication of her unashamed and unwavering dedication to the Lord, we see the fourth "Stop, Look, and Listen" sign from God. This can be described simply as the resultant supernatural reward. In verse 48 of the first chapter of Luke, Mary's response displays her appreciation for God's blessing. It also shows her realization of what it meant to have the holy One of heaven conceived in her. She humbly observes, "Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." From this statement, contrary to what some may want to think, we certainly can't infer that Mary was any more sinlessly perfect than the holiest of people who've walked on the earth before, during, and since that time. She was human. Mary at no time desired to have the worship of others because of the way in which the Lord used her. Nor did she seek the acclaim from followers of her Son. She did have the understanding, however, that because of her faith God would bless her greatly throughout the centuries of time. We must be careful, not only during the Christmas season, but also in any consideration of this marvelous, miraculous story that we don't elevate Mary beyond the place which God naturally ordained that she should occupy.

The fifth cause for us to pause and marvel carefully is found in verse 36 of the first chapter of Luke. Here the angel of the Lord tells Mary that her cousin is also to bring forth a son. In this case the supernatural "behold" was because Elizabeth was up in years. It's indicative that with old age having set in she had no doubt passed the time when normal conception could have been considered a possibility. She had been barren, but by the time the good news was revealed to Mary, the son who was to be born of Elizabeth and Zacharias was already six months in the womb. One of the most tremendous portions of Scripture surrounds this interesting aspect of the conception of John the Baptist. As the angel of the Lord reminds us, "With God nothing shall be impossible" (vs. 38).

It was shortly following the birth of our Saviour, the tremendous announcement was given first by the angel of the Lord to simple shepherds who were in the field watching over their flocks. I've an idea that the reason shepherds were chosen is because the One whose birth was being heralded would Himself be able to testify in a coming hour, "I am the good Shepherd, the good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep."

"Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." If ever there was a time when the world needed something by way of encouragement, it was then. In the situation which prevailed men were in bondage to sin. (Interestingly, during that hour, we don't find that morally we're far removed from conditions sadly seen on every hand today.) Here then, is supernatural information in the news that the Saviour of the world has been born.

In the "beholds" surrounding the birth of Christ, we also discover the very interesting and often overlooked miraculous involvement. I've categorized this as sustenance. It concerns a man who's name was Simeon. Apparently he was a very righteous individual who was devoutly looking for the coming of the promised Messiah. The supernatural sustenance comes into view when we realize Simeon had been promised by the Holy Spirit he would be kept alive until given the personal privilege of seeing Jesus Christ. At the time when the Child was brought to the temple, Simeon saw this greatest of all God's miracles displayed to him. The Saviour had taken upon Himself the form of a servant. He actually came robed in a body similar to ours. It was also Simeon who uttered a supernatural prophecy. He declared to Mary, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against, that the thoughts of many

hearts may be revealed."

But this isn't the end of the supernatural events surrounding the birth of Christ, nor of His life here on earth. We're given further cause to "Stop, Look, and Listen." We need to pause and marvel carefully, realizing that God also provided a supernatural revelation. I'm sure you remember the story well from childhood Sunday school days, especially with nativity plays presented at this time of year. There were obviously some fascinating events taking place in the heavens. In Matthew 2:1, we read at the birth of Jesus, "Behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him." The words "wise men," come from the Greek term "magoi" which is actually of Persian derivation. It has reference to those scientists in their day who were expert in the study of the stars. Of course, we have no indication there were only three of them in number. This assumption is derived from the fact there were three gifts presented: gold, frankincense and myrrh. There could have been many more, or there could have been even fewer. The word "behold" must cause us to marvel that these wise and perhaps prosperous leaders had left home, family and possessions, to come to a distant land simply following a most unusual star. They doubtless arrived some months after Christ's birth. Herod sent them on to Bethlehem so the star re-appeared, leading them to the young Child. Think of this tremendous supernatural revelation.

Also in the "beholds" of Christ's birth, we find supernatural guidance which is definitely given. In Matthew 2:13, Joseph is warned of Herod's plan to kill all the young Jewish male infants. He was hoping to do away with Israel's newborn King. An angel came to Joseph in a dream miraculously foretelling, "Behold, arise and take the young child and his mother and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him." Then later in the 19th verse of the same chapter we discover further supernatural guidance, "Behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother and go into the land of Israel; for they are dead which sought the young child's life." "Behold," pause and marvel carefully at the supernatural revelation God gave to Joseph relative to the preservation of our Lord.

We're not yet finished with the "Beholds" of Christ's coming to this earth. The first chapter of John shows us God's supernatural Substitute. He is pointed out in this definite fashion, "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world." Again, in verse 36 of the same chapter, John, with his disciples, simply declares, "Behold the Lamb of God!" Not only should we pause and marvel carefully at the events surrounding His birth, but also we can do the same with the supernatural aspect of Christ's sinless, peerless life.

Before we conclude, we can't help but realize God's supernatural bestowal to each of us. The words are familiar, and yet they need to be applied to each individual heart not only at the Christmas season, but throughout all the days of our lives. First John 3:1, 2 gives us these remarkable statements, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God (and we are). Therefore, the world knoweth us not because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God 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."

Will you pause and marvel carefully, at the supernatural gift of God's love? He couldn't give us something from this earth, for everything in the world deteriorates, and is corruptible. This is due to man's sin. This tremendous Gift came from heaven above, providing that which man could never furnish for himself, even eternal redemption.

But there's still something else. We could consider it the Stop, Look and Listen of supernatural conversion. In Psalm 37:37 the testimony is given, "Behold, the upright man, for the end of that man is peace." Now, if ever there's anything in this world that seems to occupy the intense feelings and longings of men's hearts it's the desire for inner peace, satisfaction, and contentment. Pause and marvel at this "behold." It's that of supernatural conversion. The Bible reminds us "if any man be in Christ," that is, if by faith he has received Him as his Saviour, "he will be a new creature. Old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new." One who is thusly saved has the opportunity thereby, of realizing the battle of life is not his, but it's the Lord's. Thereby, we can turn our concerns, anxieties, worries, problems and frustrations over to the Holy Spirit. John assures us in his first letter, "Greater is he that is in you (the Holy Spirit) than he (Satan) that is in the world."

Finally, there's just one other "behold" I'd like to suggest. Consider this Christmas season the supernatural translation that awaits us. In II Corinthians 3:18 we share this promise, "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord." Jesus came to this earth, to live, to die, to be resurrected, and eventually to come again for us. We have the assured promise when by faith we've received Him as Saviour, there's a coming hour when we, too, shall be given our resurrection bodies. No longer will we be subject to the rules of time and space. No longer will we be prone to sickness, emotional upsets and temptation. We shall transcend this earth, to be with Christ. Scripture assures us to be absent from the body means to be present with the Lord. Yes, in that coming blessed hour, we shall be united with our loved ones, forevermore to enjoy the glories of eternity.

Remember, when the word "behold" appears in Scripture, it's God's "Stop, Look, and Listen" sign. We are to pause and marvel carefully at the supernatural intervention, supernatural conception, Mary's supernatural submission, and her supernatural reward. Then there is the supernatural intervention for Elizabeth and Zacharias in the birth of John the Baptist. The supernatural information given to the shepherds in the fields, and ultimately to us as well. The supernatural sustenance in prophecy to Simeon at the birth of Christ. The supernatural coming of the wise men as a result of the revelation God gave to them. There was the supernatural occurrence of the angel to Joseph in a dream. This provided supernatural guidance.

But more than all of these, I think today of the supernatural substitution of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And the supernatural bestowal of God's love to our hearts, providing the supernatural conversion and ultimately the supernatural translation or rapture when we shall be caught up together with the Lord to meet Him in clouds. The "beholds" of Christ's birth provide the supernatural meaning, the true basic understanding of this Christmas season.

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PHILIPPIANS

By DR. LLOYD T. ANDERSON

INTERCESSION

While in a Roman prison Paul spoke forcefully to the Philippians about the deeper meaning of prayer (Phil. 4:6, 7). We can never overestimate the importance of our personal involvement in intercession with the Lord.

At the last supper (Luke 22:31, 32), Jesus turned to Peter and prophesied, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou are converted, strengthen thy brethren." Peter boldly answered, "Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death." Jesus had to lift the veil and explain, "I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me." Of course, just exactly that took place. With loud oaths Peter denied he ever knew the Lord. Yet the prayer Jesus offered for him was not in vain. When Christ's gaze met Peter's in the courtyard, he remembered the Saviour's words. Although he fell, Peter's faith did not fail. The devil thought he had Peter, too, when he was sleeping on his watch in Gethsemane. The devil thought he had Peter when he heard him deny Christ. In the battle for the disciple's soul, Satan lost. The prayers of Christ were victorious.

When Thomas Carlisle applied to a family for the position of tutor, he stated his qualifications. He wrote at the end of the recommendation, "And I do not forget the prayers of my pious parents." The greatest prayer anyone could ever offer for another is the prayer for the salvation of his soul. How thankful we should be for the faithful remembrance by godly mothers and fathers over the years.

Perhaps you have gotten away from God. You know in your heart you are uncomfortable and perhaps even miserable. Don't overlook the fact that somewhere there is a godly person who has prayed for you. Someday God will hold you responsible for their petitions on your behalf. You cannot keep running away from the Lord.

There is also the fact that each of us is in the prayers of our Saviour. A man may have ceased to pray for himself long ago. There may be no one on earth who loves him enough to pray for him. This is when he should remember Jesus Christ is praying for him. We are all included in our Lord's last high priestly prayer recorded for our blessing in John 17.

Prayer is always to be approached with the understanding that the will of God is to be fulfilled. While in deepest agony in the Garden of Gethsemane this is what our Lord prayed for Himself. It was after this sign of complete surrender to the will of God there appeared an angel from heaven strengthening Jesus in His humanity. The cup which He symbolically had to drink was singularly His own. None of us could ever taste it, although we have our own cups of sorrow. When they are pressed to our lips we can arm ourselves after the manner Christ did. In our

agony we can likewise pray, "Nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done." We can also have confidence that He who sent the angel to strengthen our Redeemer will also give us strength in the hour of our deepest and greatest need.

On the cross of Calvary, Jesus uttered three different prayers. The first one concerned forgiveness (Luke 23:24), "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." The second was His heart cry at about the ninth hour, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" God the Father and God the Holy Spirit had to leave Christ alone as He went through the awfulness of that atonement experience for us. This is how desperately God was giving life for the lost world which He loves. The final prayer of Jesus, the shortest of them all, sums up the entire picture, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Thus, Jesus fell into the sleep of death on the cross. The battle was won and the struggle was over. The price of sin had been paid in full.

MODERATION

Everything we do in the Christian life should be guided by the realization that our moderation is to be known to all men. The very real reason for this is that the Lord is at hand. Certain ideals, even for our thought patterns are carefully spelled out in Scripture (Phil. 4:8, 9). This is the only way whereby we can fully enjoy the blessing of realizing that the God of all peace is with us. It was the testimony of the Psalmist, "I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope" (Psalms 16:8-11). He well knew that only in the presence of the Lord would there be fulness of joy and pleasures forevermore.

You remember that it was by faith that Moses "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." He rather chose to suffer affliction with the people of God. He had renounced any desires for the momentary and seeming pleasures of sin. This is not to say that the life of Christianity and pleasure are incompatible. Yet we have all met those who say they don't want to come to Christ because they feel all they would be able to expect is some sort of an unhappy existence they have seen so many Christians living. Such misunderstandings result from ignorance of biblical teachings on the whole subject of pleasure.

Hebrews 11:24-25 gives us the commentary on Moses' decision to be identified with God's people. As prince of the royal household, he could have had his own full share of the pleasures of sin. The world with its lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, and the pride of life lay absolutely at his feet. Yet, he deliberately denounced it all to reveal the depth of his true wisdom. Without question the pleasures of sin and the pleasures of lust do provide excitement and enjoyment. The devil will certainly see to that. Yet enjoyment, as far as lust is concerned, is always an end in itself, rather than being a means to an end. Such practices are certainly enslaving, governing complete power over the human life. Jesus tells us, "whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John 8:34).

The Bible also refers to those pleasures which are perfectly proper and lawful. In the parable of the various seed sown on different types of ground, Jesus warned His hearers about being choked with the cares, the riches and even the pleasures of this life. No doubt He meant here those things which if kept in their proper perspective, He intended for the enjoyment of man. Whether these pleasures are truly appreciated depends on whether they are used, abused, or misused. No one can read the New Testament without observing that God intends us to use all the good gifts which this world contains (I Tim. 6:17). There is no question but that our human natures demand rest, relaxation and even recreation. The Lord recognizes this. The pleasures of the believer should constitute a proper balance with a disciplined

blending of all phases of activity. The problem is that all too seldom do we really look into our hearts to see objectively how we stand before the Lord in these important areas of consideration.

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

One of the best definitions of sin is to realize in a three-fold manner that it is a disobedient act, a disloyal act, and a doubtful act. The believer certainly has liberty in Jesus Christ since he has been set free and is no longer under the law but rather grace. The Lord intends for us to relax and to find that perfect balance of enjoyment in the Lord. Recreation, while a necessity must be the reward of work. It really means a re-supplying of waste. Just as the body calls for replenishing of itself by food and sleep, so the mind and nerves after prolonged effort need restoration. Varying temperaments of people demand various kinds of recreation. The essential thing is to insure a change of pace. Almost any recreation is good and profitable if it directs ones thoughts and energies into fresh and new channels. We should certainly avoid excess. Enjoyment can easily pass into dissipation and can soon become exhausting.

To guide us in our thinking, Scripture proposes several test questions as guarding principles. First, do these pleasures in which I engage positively encourage my Christian life? We read in I Corinthians 6:12, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient." This means they are not profitable providing helpful encouragement. There are many activities which are perfectly legitimate and lawful yet they may not encourage growth in the Christian life.

Secondly, do these pleasures positively endanger my Christian life? Paul went on in this passage to affirm, "I will not be brought under the power of any." We cannot allow anything to choke off our spiritual breath (Luke 8:14). Such a point should provide the red light warning to each of us in every sphere and activity of our involvement.

Thirdly, do these pleasures positively enrich my Christian life (I Cor. 10:23)? There are some things which merely dissipate energy, wasting time which could be more profitably invested for the Lord. We should seek those things which positively enrich and edify us emotionally, physically and mentally. These are what we will find to be truly beneficial.

The Christian should know how any true pleasures of life can be used to the glory of God, as well as to his own personal edification. For this reason, we must avoid all appearance of evil. We are certainly to turn aside from lustful things. God has given us all things to enjoy (I Tim. 6:17). Ask the Holy Spirit for His unerring guidance and direction as we seek to determine exactly what we should do to glorify God. At the same time seek His leading for that recreation and pleasure which can help us to be relieved of the tensions and pressures of life. The Lord has reserved His very best for those who would follow such a scriptural pattern for their daily existence.

PEACE

Have you ever stopped to realize just how wonderful spiritual peace really is? There are not too many people in the world who have enjoyed the possession of this priceless commodity. In Philippians 4:6-8 we are given an excellent prescription for our individual lives. Not only are we to rid our minds of all worry and anxiety, but we are to fill the void with things of positive value and consideration.

The first important aspect is to consider those things which are true. A good and

practical rule for mental health is to be true to the Lord, to our fellow men, and to ourselves. Then, as to those things which are honest, we should consider what is honorable and demands respect. "Whatsoever things are just" suggests to give thought to what is right both by divine as well as human standards. Purity is another safe area on which the mind can dwell. The peace of God cannot be experienced if that which is dirty and defiled becomes our prime interest. "Things that are lovely" brings to mind beauty of character as a worthy replacement for the ugly, selfish and arrogant. Such beauty truly reveals genuine spiritual holiness. The "good report" is the well-sounding and well-spoken testimony which wins the support and approbation of others. Here are six prime virtues of the Christian life (Phil. 4:8).

Have you taken the time to think on what should cause careful reflection? As born-again believers we ought to be calling on these areas at all times. How long has it been since you examined your thought life? It is an easy thing to let your mind get sluggish so you give way to those things which rob you of spiritual peace. As St. Augustine once said, "We can't keep the birds from flying over our heads, but we certainly don't have to allow them to build a nest in our hair!" The Philippian believers had learned and received many great truths from the Apostle Paul. He was a tremendous example to them by his own life. He always sought to live an exemplary life. This is why he could write to Timothy, "But thou hast fully known my doctrine and you have known the way I live" (I. Tim. 3:10). He preached what he practiced, and practiced what he preached. We have not learned biblical truths well until we have literally lived them out in experience day by day. Noble thoughts are of little value unless they are translated into human deeds.

We need to recognize that although many issues trouble Christians some are more important than others. Too often we get caught up in non-essentials. We even argue points not even valid for consideration. There are those who even subscribe to a list of "dos" and "don'ts" for the Christian life. Many may simply be the ideas of some evangelist or minister who gave his own personal viewpoints. We must realize the Lord has spoken in His Word giving us certain principles to determine what is good or bad for the believer. Behavioral patterns don't necessarily become the badge of commitment to Christ. For example, in Switzerland some time ago, women were noted for their spiritual life if they wore long hair. If it was short it revealed they had backslidden. An American preacher tells of his series of meetings in Germany when some of the people felt he might not be so spiritual since, while teaching the Bible, he had a white handkerchief hanging out of his breast pocket. This isn't meant to be funny, but rather shows the way some people become enslaved to ideas not advanced in Scripture. Let us make sure we are concerned about the more significant matters in life. Some doubtful things are really foolish when you analyze them. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to give us real light in this important area of consideration.

Provided in the salvation which Christ purchased for us with His own shed blood is tremendous freedom from the bondage to sin. So often we set standards far from realistic as far as Scripture is concerned. One of the widows of the five brave missionaries who were martyred in Ecuador tells of how she had always come to regard clothing as a sign of spirituality. Yet, when she got to Ecuador, she found women who wore almost nothing at all. Nevertheless she discovered they were very conscious of the proper ways to walk and stand. There was no thought in their minds of any immodesty. As a result, the missionary had to reevaluate the way she thought. Where do proper standards come from?

As another example it may be easy for you to criticize someone who uses alcohol when it is not a problem confronting you. At the same time we give no thought of impropriety to talking or gossiping about others so involved. The fact, of course, is we are no longer under the law but rather grace. The battle against legalism was won in this manner.

Likewise there is a great error in license. This goes to the other extreme teaching we are not under law therefore we can do anything we please. We don't need to sin simply to allow grace to abound. Such an argument is from the devil (Rom. 6:15). "What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace?" Because we have been made free from sin we are to become servants of God (verse 22).

"For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). Legalism is certainly not the answer to the problem. Nor can we simply organize a group of people to declare whether certain things are right or wrong. The final and only authority must be the Word of God. The grace of God actually leads to holiness. Hence we should not fear to abolish legalism as an answer to the problem of Christian conduct. Legalism certainly does not promote happiness. Nor does the other extreme of license. The higher aspect or rule of life must be found in abounding love for the Saviour. The grace of God never makes us rebels but rather individuals who possess a firm and deep devotion to the Lord. It is only on the level of grace that we can experience this deep-seated desire to please Him in all that we do and say.

LAW OF LOVE

There is much today to cloud our minds and claim attention for our thoughts. In Philippians 4:8 and 9 we are given the safe list of those channels where we can safely allow our concepts to be centered. The law of love is the answer to the problem of the standards we are to set for our lives. We should want to please the Lord because of what He has done for us. Too many of us just follow the course of least resistance, willing to compromise with the world. The children of Israel were rightly told, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude (or the crowd) to do evil" (Exodus 23:2). The only safe rule to practice concerning worldly things is, "if it is doubtful then don't."

A professor at a large Western university complained that Christianity was a depressingly negative religion. He failed to realize that such a concept depends on one's point of view. While our faith may look negative to the academician the problem is he can see only one side. He is still spiritually blinded without godly perception. Many have the idea that when one becomes a Christian all the fun and pleasure disappears from life. Many picture God as an exacting paymaster with a giant set of scales. On these He balances off men's good deeds against their bad and in this way determines our eternal destiny. Salvation doesn't come by adhering to a list of negatives any more than it can be realized by following a list of positive actions. Salvation is not a work to be done but rather work to believe about, a work Christ has already done (Eph. 2:8, 9). There are a great number who readily recognize that they are initially saved by accepting Jesus Christ. Yet they still have the erroneous idea that the rest of their Christian living is entirely up to them. Christ, however, not only saves us, but also keeps us day by day. Make no mistake. We are not saved simply by being good. Look at it this way. If a Christian cannot be saved by good works, how in the world can he be kept by good works? If salvation depended on us Jesus could not have said, "They shall never perish" (John 10:28). We are rather eternally secure (II Tim. 1:12). God's faithfulness, not ours, is the key to salvation as well as the key to perseverance. It is the Lord's desire that we might be conformed to the image of His own Son. This is why we are to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world (Titus 2:12).

There may be nothing wrong with the things you want to do. The question is, is it the thing God wants? There are certain things which may have a harmful effect on us physically. Then again, what we do may cause someone else to stumble (I Cor. 6:12). Remember, the Lord does not set us free from the law just so that we can become slaves to licentiousness. The key is, are you using the thing or is the thing using you?

The actions of one believer may hurt the spiritual growth of another. We don't have to take our standards from what others think or say. Our primary and final source must be the Bible.

No Christian lives unto himself. There are always those who are watching to see how we react to certain circumstances and situations. We are free in Christ and yet we also have deep responsibilities. Just a small trace of worldliness, allowed to come between us and the Saviour, can hide Him from our sight while stunting our spiritual growth. This is the way backsliding begins. No wonder so many believers have lost their effectiveness for Christ. Generally it doesn't take very much. The love of money, popularity, or social prominence can often be the cause.

In Genesis 13 we read of Lot who was the nephew of Abraham. He had pitched his tent toward the city of Sodom for it appealed to the eyes. Soon this vision of plenty filled his heart. He settled down in these cities of corruption and soon lost his testimony. His own children wouldn't even believe him when he warned them of God's impending judgment. His final estate was to have lost it all. The tragedy is that his downfall began with a simple look.

There are times when we ought to avoid certain things even though they may appear harmless in themselves. They may well become detrimental to someone else who is weak in the faith, or an unbeliever (I Cor. 6:12; 10:23). We are, as examples, to be consistent in our own abstinence from those things which are questionable. We are not to appear double-faced or hypocritical.

It was in Corinth that some believers noticed other Christians going down to the market place to buy meat previously offered in the temple to heathen idols. Although there was nothing hygenically wrong with the food, such a practice caused others to be confused and to stumble (I Cor. 8:13). This is why the Apostle Paul told them, "If this kind of meat is going to make my brother in Christ to sin, then I am willing to forfeit eating meat of this type for the rest of my life." We must remember it will be costly if we are careful of the effect of our conduct on others. There is the other extreme too. Some people are so pious they are just no earthly good. Care should be taken in this area as well. The Christian is to decide between doubtful things by always choosing the best (Phil. 4:8). The pursuit of the best things by the Christian will necessarily mean the pursuit of fellowship with the Lord. It should be our fervent desire by all means to advance the claims of the Gospel. A true Christian can love all that is true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report wherever he finds it. We can thank God that He has given us means of ability to enjoy His matchless provisions. We only need to make certain that we keep our involvement in proper perspective to what His perfect will is for our lives day by day.

Because of his careful desire to follow the Lord in all things, the Apostle Paul was able to urge others to emulate his life to find spiritual reality (Phil. 4:9). It is well to keep in mind, too, that certainly the Holy Spirit is the author of God's Word. This is why, as the human penman, Paul could urge such a practice. It is thrilling to realize between the eternity of the past and the eternity of the future God has a very definite plan for each of our lives.

I have been interested to note the number three has a very remarkable significance in the Bible. It stands for completion or entirety, representing that which is absolutely real. In other spheres of interest it is also true. As to time we have past, present and future. In quality there is good, better and best. In grammatical construction there is first, second and third person. There are three kingdoms consisting of all matter, mineral, vegetable and animal. Three functions express the sum of human capability, thought, word and deed. The family circle is known by father, mother and children. Paul was especially familiar with the sub-

ject of numerology when it came to salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. Threes are easily seen in the Bible, such as the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The sons of Noah, from whom came the world's population after the flood, were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Peter, James and John are found in the New Testament. According to Jesus the three parts of the Old Testament are the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms. In the Trinity itself there is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The unholy trilogy consists of Satan, the anti-christ, and the false prophet. Salvation also comes in three distinct aspects, although for the most part we may only consider it from the past tense standpoint. We would first underscore that unless an individual has accepted Christ as his personal Saviour he is not a part of salvation at all. This eternal transaction involves that which is in the past, present and future. It is a past experience, a present process, and a future prospect.

The past experience of salvation is from the penalty of sin. It gives us the assurance that we have passed from death unto life (John 5:24). This truth is emphasized by the Holy Spirit as a completed transaction (II Tim. 1:9). Because of this, is it any wonder that Paul begins the 8th chapter of Romans with, "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Salvation was accomplished when the Saviour bore our sins in His own body as He hung upon that accursed tree. This deliverance from the penalty of our sins becomes a tremendous reality the moment faith is expressed in the Lord (Acts 16:31). Our iniquities have been removed from us as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). The past experience of salvation is unconditional and absolutely eternal. We now can enjoy a new standing and relationship with Christ, sharing in that perfect peace which passes all human understanding.

BIOLA HOUR HIGHLIGHTS
DECEMBER, 1973

Panel Discussions

Panel: *Dr. Chase, Dr. Feinberg, and Dr. Sutherland*

Q. "What is the birthright spoken of in Genesis 49? Is it still used in some Jewish families?"

A. Deuteronomy 21:17 tells us that the firstborn was to receive a double portion of all the father had. This practice is not followed today although it was in operation at the time the historic books of the Old Testament were written. You remember, when Elijah was to be taken home by the Lord he asked Elisha, his under-study, what he would like to have as a parting gift. The younger prophet wisely asked for a double portion of his spirit. This was the right of the firstborn. We do not know of any Jewish families which do this today.

Q. "What is the Apostles' Creed and who wrote it?"

A. Many churches recite this each Sunday as a part of their opening exercises. No one knows who wrote the Apostles' Creed. It is interesting to note the word "creed" comes from the Latin credo which means "I believe." The Apostles' Creed is simply a formulation of what Christians believe. This goes back to at least 140 A.D. The form in common use today was finalized about 450 A.D.

Q. "Does Matthew 24:40-41 refer to the Rapture or to the return of the Lord to set up His kingdom?"

A. Right interpretation of this question will keep us from a great deal of confusion. First of all, it does not refer to the Rapture. Our Lord was speaking to His disciples as representatives of godly Jews just before the coming again of the Messiah. This is to follow the Tribulation. How could Christ expand on things relative to the Church before He died? The whole point of the passage is to show the suddenness of the event and the overflowing, sweeping character of the judgment which follows. The contemporaries of Noah are "taken away" in judgment. In the Rapture we are "caught up" for blessing. So Matthew 24:40-41 speaks of what will happen at the time of the Tribulation followed by Messiah's coming to set up His millennial reign.

Q. "Can you give some helpful ideas on how to study the book of Revelation? I just keep avoiding it because I don't know how to approach it."

A. Certainly don't avoid this blessed book! Get into it, read it and study it. It is the only portion of Scripture which ascribes to itself a special blessing. Study the book of Revelation like you would eat a piece of fish. When you come to a bone, one doesn't throw the whole fish away. You just put the bone to one side and go ahead enjoying the rest of the meat. Even so, in studying Revelation, or any portion of the Bible, and you come to a spiritual "bone" you can't understand, don't throw the whole book away. Set it aside to study the part you do understand. Granted, there is much we can't understand. At the same time, there is also much

we can understand.

To aid in your study, there are three points of view as to the overall interpretation of the book. One is historicist interpretation. That is, everything is past history so none of it applies to us today. Another is the praetorist point of view which declares the early part of the book is history while there are also some future events foretold. The third view is futurist which holds that all is future except the first three chapters. This is the position we at Biola take. It is based upon Revelation 1:19. The things the Apostle John saw were those included in the Patmos vision (Rev. 1:9-18). In chapters two and three we have the things which are, from the standpoint of the day in which John lived. This is Christ's last message to His church. In typology, the seven churches of Asia Minor illustrate churches in existence in every generation. "The things which shall be hereafter" begin with chapter four to the end of the book. All, of course, are given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Do not expect to understand all of Revelation the first time you read it. Get a good commentary to help you.

Q. "Is there a difference between a disciple, an apostle, and a believer?"

A. There are some very important aspects to consider. They are not all synonymous. A disciple is literally "a taught one." A disciple could be a believer or an unbeliever as we note from Judas' case (John 6:66). A believer on the other hand, is one who has trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. He is a disciple who has gone on beyond just the hearing. He has accepted the truth as the very Word of God. An apostle is a disciple and a believer with one other prerequisite (Acts 1:21-22). He must have been one who had actually seen the resurrected Christ. For that reason, we do not have any real apostles with us today.

Q. "Did the birth of Christ actually occur on December 25th?"

A. Many people would throw out the commemoration of our Lord's incarnation just because no one can verify the actual date. In all likelihood it was not December 25. The shepherds are reported in Luke 2 to be out in the fields watching their flocks by night. In winter this probably would not have been possible. Christmas is not as old a celebration as Easter. Easter corresponds to the Passover of the Old Testament. The early Christians celebrated the death and resurrection of the Lord right along with the time of the Old Testament Passover. So to complete the cycle of Christian holidays the idea of celebrating the birth of Christ came more and more into practice. The date was fixed around December 25 to fill out the calendar year so far as holy days were concerned. Incidentally, our word "holiday" is a perversion of the words "holy days," and it has come to mean something entirely different than holy. While the world misuses Christmas, we as Christians should commemorate His birth.

Q. "Each religion seems to have a person who is similar to Jesus. How do we know that Christ is really God's Son?"

A. Study these various religions and you will see apart from their own writings no other attestation is given. The Lord did a remarkable thing. Though the Jewish people had over 50 false messiahs, not one of them ever dared to do what the Saviour did. He said plainly, "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me." Then there were His miraculous works. No one ever performed the deeds He was able to achieve. No other leader could do that. Christ is in a class all by Himself. He could make the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk; He even raised from the dead. His works testify of Him. Then consider His marvelous words. Even those who wanted to arrest Him could really find no fault. They had to affirm, "Never a man spake as

this man." His words have been the marvel of even unbelievers to this very hour. This is not true of any other religion known to man. He spoke of things that were to come. He said He was going to be crucified, when it was not even a Jewish method of capital punishment. Three times He said, "If I be lifted up from the earth I will draw all men unto me." What influence, what fulfilled prophecy. We know He is God's Son. There are not only external proofs but also those which are internal. Consider the millions who can testify to the saving power and deliverance available through Jesus Christ. Thank God, He is not similar to anybody else in the world! He alone is the One who is worthy of preeminence!

Q. "What was the Christmas star?"

A. This is recorded for us in the second chapter of Matthew's account of the nativity. There have been many efforts to identify the so-called Christmas star which was something completely unusual in nature. The fact remains no one fully knows for sure. It could well be the star was simply a manifestation of an angel who appeared in this form for a specific purpose of prophetic fulfillment. Probably the wise men were astrologers from the East. They came to Jerusalem and sought out Herod for information. All we know for a certainty is the star was a divine manifestation leading these men to the place of the birth of the Lord Jesus.

Q. "A pastor made the statement, God does not love the world. He said John 3:16 is in the past tense and God's love ended at Calvary. Is this true?"

A. This is definitely not true! God's love was supremely manifested in the person of His only begotten Son so He could be available for all the centuries to come. Consider the phrase, "That whosoever believeth in Him." This isn't past tense certainly. It was said of our Saviour in Hebrews, "Jesus Christ, the same, yesterday, today, and forever." John 3:16 refers to the historical manifestation and outworking of God's love which is always constant. If you need further proof, read Romans 8:35-39 where we see nothing can separate us from this divine love. Our Lord is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9).

Q. "In order to be filled with the Holy Spirit does a person need to sense a definite change in his life?"

A. The Bible does not state one has to sense any definite change in his life as far as some ecstatic action or emotional attitude. There is a tremendous transformation which takes place when an individual receives Christ as Saviour, but this doesn't have to be accompanied by an outward manifestation. When the Holy Spirit enters our lives through faith in Christ it will be manifested in our daily lives, in our personal attitudes, and in our relationships with others.

Q. "If blindness is sent upon Israel in II Corinthians 3:14, how is it possible for them (Israel) to accept Christ?"

A. There are four passages in the Bible on blindness: Isaiah 24-27; II Corinthians 4:3-4, which is really a hardening in the original language; Romans 11:25; and II Corinthians 3:14. This blindness which visited the Jews was a general hardening of their hearts. Of course, on an individual basis, if one responds to the wooing of the Spirit of God then there is still salvation full and free (II Cor. 3:16). Yes, thank God, any heart that will turn to Christ will be saved.

Q. "Do men today write under inspiration as those who wrote the Bible?"

A. The answer is briefly absolutely not! Several thousand times in the Old

Testament we read the words, "The Word of the Lord came, saying. . ."; "God spake saying. . ." The New Testament writers all attest to the fact the Scriptures were written under inspiration of the Holy Spirit in a very peculiar and distinctive manner. The New Testament apostles themselves claim over and over again to have been writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We loosely speak of being inspired, but we are not to think for a moment it is the same as in the writing of the Bible.