

The Remnant

*“Even so then at this
present time also there
is a remnant according to
the election of grace.”
Romans 11.5*

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THE VISION OF THE GOLDEN CANDLESTICK

And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, and said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: and two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof. So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord? Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it. Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things? For they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth. Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these

two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof? And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves? And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then he said, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth. Zechariah 4.1-14

“**A**nd the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, and said unto me, What seest thou?” It seems that our normal state—though we perceive it not—is a state of sleep. We think we see, but we see not. We think we are aware of the reality of our situation, but we are in a dream state. We think we are lucid, but our thoughts are diffused and muddled with the delusions and deceptions of this world and the carnal mind. From time to time it pleases Almighty God to come to us again and wake us from our sleep. It is really only as the Lord speaks with power that we are truly awakened to see things as they are.

Having wakened us out of our sleep, the Lord asks, “What seest thou?” He focuses our attention on that which we cannot see in nature and that which we cannot see in our sleep state. He directs us to that which we can only see by the eye of faith—that which is revealed unto us by His Spirit when the eyes of our understanding are enlightened. He doesn’t tell us what to see, but He asks, “What seest thou?”

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“And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: and two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof. So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord?” Zechariah was chosen and blessed to see the mystery “which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.” Though he saw the vision, he had to ask, “What are these, my lord?” The golden candlestick with the seven lamps thereon immediately calls for a comparison to the vision given to John on the Isle of Patmos. As John relates his experience

he says, “And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man...(Revelation 1.12, 13).” The Lord revealed to John that the seven candlesticks were the seven churches. As the number seven is a special number used in the scripture to signify fullness, completion, or perfection, I take the seven candlesticks of Revelation to represent the whole number of the churches of Christ.

The use of a candlestick to represent a new testament gospel church is appropriate. Our Lord called His disciples the light of the world. He said, “Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house (Matthew 5.15).” The candlestick is the appointed place for the candle to shine. The apostle Paul called the church “the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3.15).” It is that in which the truth rests and which holds up the truth—just as the candle rests on the candlestick and is held up by it. The primary function of a candlestick is to hold a candle. The important thing is the light given off by the candle. As beautifully crafted as the candlestick may be, it does not exist to draw attention to itself. Without the light the candlestick is just a piece of clutter to collect dust. So it is with the churches of Christ. The function of the church is to display the glorious gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The important thing about the church is the gospel of Christ. The church is not here to draw attention to herself, but to let her light so shine before men that they may glorify her Father who is in heaven. If a gospel church could exist without the light of the gospel of Christ (and it cannot), it would be a useless piece of dust-gathering clutter in the over-crowded flea market of worldly religion.

There are several features of this candlestick vision that deserve our attention. First, the material of this candlestick is pure gold. Second, the candlestick has one base and seven lamps. Third, the manner in which this candlestick is supplied with fuel from the two olive trees to the bowl, and through the pipes to the lamps. Fourth, the meaning or application of this vision to the church of Christ. Fifth, the promise of the vision for the church.

First, notice that the candlestick in Zechariah’s vision is made “all of gold.” Gold is a precious metal of great worth. Gold was used to overlay various

pieces of holy furniture in the tabernacle. The mercy seat within the veil was made of pure gold. The faith of the children of God is compared to gold. The experience of a child of grace in this world is a trial of this faith—a refining of this gold. The members of a gospel church are to be born again believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who bring forth the fruits of righteousness by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

Second, the candlestick has one base and seven lamps. There is a unity underlying the several lamps of this candlestick. The church of Jesus Christ is one manifested in many. Our Lord “called to him whom he would” of those who had received the baptism of John. He ordained the twelve as apostles—the “sent out” ones—to preach and baptize. After His ascension He endued the church with power by the Holy Spirit. At the beginning there was one assembly in Jerusalem. Then, according to His word, the disciples bore witness to the gospel in all Judea, Samaria, and throughout the world. In each place where believers dwelt churches were established. There is no hierarchy of religious organization among the churches of Christ. The only manifestation of the church which Jesus built is the local assembly of saints with Jesus Christ as their head. In each locality this body is a lamp of the golden candlestick. Though the churches are separate and independent, they are united by a common relation to Jesus Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the gospel witness which they bear, and the order of the house of God which they keep.

The churches of Jesus Christ do not resort to conventions, boards, synods, archbishops, popes, or any other ecclesiastical glue to hold them together. They are little flocks of Christ’s sheep under the common headship of Christ. He said, “There shall be one fold, and one shepherd (John 10.16).”

Third, the manner in which this candlestick is supplied with fuel from the two olive trees to the bowl, and through the pipes to the lamps. The light of the churches is the witness of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. This light shines forth in each assembly of the saints. The fuel for this light is the life of God in the churches which flows from the two olive trees, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The light and life of the church is directly from God. The church does not live and shine by political structures,

theological education, the support of the governments of this world, or the wisdom of men, but by the power of God.

“In his church history Hassell says: ‘Babylon was an idolatrous nation; and it is demonstrably certain that, if human language means anything, the language employed by a large number of high officials in these modern religious confederacies represents these human means and methods as the most important and indispensable requisite for the conversion and salvation of the world—that is, they represent those human institutions as gods, and thus, confederating with Babylon, professed Christians have become idolatrous too, just as the Scriptures abundantly warn us. Christ and His apostles, let it be indelibly impressed upon our minds and hearts, instituted absolutely none of these forbidden, unhallowed and contaminating, idolatrous and ruinous Egyptian and Babylonian confederacies. There were in the apostolic church no such auxiliary religious societies as Foreign Missionary Societies, Home Missionary Societies, Bible Societies, Tract Societies, Education Societies, Dorcas Societies, Temperance Societies, Secret Benevolent Societies; neither were there any Infant Church Memberships, Substitutions of Sprinkling or Pouring for Baptism, Sunday Schools, Religious Picnics and Excursions, Church Fairs, Festivals, Tableaux, Holy Raffling, Holy Shooting at the Mark for money, Protracted Meetings full of Holy Altars, Pharisaic Preachers, Anxious Benches and Mourners’ Seats, Life Memberships in Religious Societies for sale at \$100 each or less, Pulpit Affiliations with unregenerate and unbaptized religionists, Female Revivalists, Theological Seminaries, Doctors of Divinity, Reverend Gentlemen, a Man-Called, Man-Qualified, and Salaried Ministry, Corrupting alliances of Church and State, Authoritative and Imperious Religious Bodies above the individual Churches, Bishops above Elders, Popes, Cardinals, Prelates, Diocesan Bishops, Arch-Bishops, Metropolitans, Monks,

Nuns, Jesuits, Holy Wafers, Holy Days, Ave Marias, Holy Images, Holy Relics, Holy Candles, Holy Incense, Holy Prayer-Books, Holy Litanies, Holy Silken Gowns, Holy White Muslin Robes, Holy Inquisitions, supplied with Holy Racks, Holy Tortures, Holy Red-Hot Tongs, with which to pinch the flesh and pull out the tongues of Christians, Holy Crusaders to hunt them down with barbarous armies and slay them by thousands, Holy Sale of Indulgences to Sin for money enough, Holy Confessionals, Holy Penances, Holy Purgatories. Without these outward means of men's and Satan's invention, and in direct opposition to all human and diabolical schemes and powers, the word of God grew mightily and prevailed, so that in the 70 years from A. D. 30 to 100, according to the general estimate, the number of Christians increased to five hundred thousand in all parts of the heathen Roman Empire. It was the glorious work of the Almighty Spirit of God, who quickeneth whom He will, and bestows spiritual gifts on men according to His good pleasure, who has but to breathe upon the valley of dry bones and they will live, while, without the divine Spirit, all the wise, pretentious, monetary, unscriptural devices of men are less than nothing and vanity' (Hassell, quoted in *The Kehukee Declaration and Black Rock Address*, page 9-11, by Elder W. J. Berry)."

Many in the religious world have long been predicting the extinction of the Old School Baptists. They cannot understand how such a peculiar group of churches who do not utilize the means and methods of the world can continue to survive. What they do not see is the fact that the Lord of hosts fuels the golden candlestick. The church of Christ may say with the apostle Paul, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me (Galatians 2.20)."

Fourth, the meaning or application of this vision to the church of Christ. "So I answered and spake to

the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord? Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

The preservation and prosperity of Zion is a glorious and mysterious work of the grace and providence of Almighty God. Zerubbabel was the Jewish leader ordained to rebuild the temple of God in Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. I believe he stands as a type of the Builder of the church, Jesus Christ. Zerubbabel had few resources, a small population of followers who had lived in captivity, and a vast array of powerful adversaries. The prospect of completing his appointed task must have been bleak, if he looked at the situation in the light of human reason. The word of the Lord to Zerubbabel was the best encouragement he or any heaven-taught soul could ask for. It is not by might or by power that the house of God is to be built—that is not by human might or power. If the building project depended on the available human ability for its completion, one might as well not even break out the plumbline. But no, this project is under the authority of the Lord of Hosts, the One who speaks and it is done, who commands and it stands fast. It is "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Zerubbabel, like Abraham before him, could go to work, not considering the apparent hopelessness of the situation, but believing that what God had promised He was able to perform.

The parallel with the church of Christ is unmistakable. Our Zerubbabel, Jesus Christ, is commissioned to build His church—the house of God and pillar and ground of the truth. This house is built with meager resources from the human standpoint. "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are (1 Corinthians 1.26-28)." The

followers of the Lamb are few in number and have a history of captivity to the law of sin and death. The adversaries are many and mighty. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6.12).” “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you (John 15.18-19).” “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5.8).”

In spite of the array of adversaries and difficulties, the word of the Lord to our Zerubbabel, and through Him to us, is a strong consolation and anchor for our hope. It is not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. The word *might* is the Hebrew word *chayil*. According to Strong, the word means “a force, whether of men, means, or other resources; an army, wealth, virtue, valor, strength.” The word *power* is *kowach*, which Strong defines as “to be firm; vigor, literally (force, in a good or bad sense) or figuratively (capacity, means, produce); also (from its hardiness) a large lizard.” So the building, preservation, prosperity, or completion of the church of Jesus Christ is not accomplished by the force of men, the implementation of means, the financial or intellectual or moral resources of men, armies, auxiliaries, human resolve, vigor or hardiness. These are carnal weapons employed by those whose kingdom is of this world. But, “though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10.3-5).”

The church of Christ, the spiritual kingdom of God, which is not of this world, is built and sustained by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts. It makes no difference how many or how powerful the enemies of the cross of Christ may be. It makes no difference if the governments of this world or the Babylonian religious powers of this world rage against the little flock of Christ. It makes no difference if the great

dragon, Apollyon, and his hosts of demons swarm the earth seeking to destroy the work of God. It makes no difference if the churches are small, their members feeble, poor, or uneducated in the wisdom of this world. The thing that does make a difference is that God is for us and in us. The Spirit of the Eternal God of heaven and earth works in the hearts of the children of God—teaching, comforting, strengthening, guiding, subduing flesh, and magnifying the Lord Jesus Christ in His glorious headship.

It is not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Can the most feeble, confused, halting saint fail to be encouraged by this word? Stand for the truth in the face of all opposition. Contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. Fight the good fight of faith. Take no thought for tomorrow. Ask not “what shall we eat?” or “what shall we drink?” or “wherewithal shall we be clothed?” Our God is in the heavens, and He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased. The Lord hath prepared His throne in heaven, and His kingdom ruleth over all. Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world. He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run, and not be weary. They shall walk, and not faint. This people have I formed for myself [saith the Lord]. They shall show forth my praise. O child of grace, rejoice in the Lord and trust in Him that He will defend His flock and cause His church to prevail against all her adversaries. It is not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.

Fifth, the promise of the vision for the church. “Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it. Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things? For they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth.”

John the Baptist came at the appointed time as a voice crying in the wilderness, “Prepare ye the way

of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it (Isaiah 40.3-5).” The great mountain of opposition to the Lord’s building project shall become a plain before our Zerubbabel, Jesus Christ. His hands have laid the foundation of this house. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3.11).” His hands shall also finish it. Jesus said, “Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16.18).”

History has borne out the truth of these words to this day. Surely the gates of hell have unleashed every conceivable weapon against the faithful witnesses of the Lamb over the centuries. The Jewish nation, the Roman Empire, the Great Whore of Roman Catholicism, the Harlot Daughters of Protestantism, and other antichrist powers of this world have tried in vain to extinguish the lamps of the golden candlestick of the church of Christ. The heathen have raged and the people have imagined a vain thing. Yet hear the word of the Lord: “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel (Psalm 2.4-9).”

“For who hath despised the day of small things?” It is a common worldly practice—especially in these United States of America—to despise small things. Men boast in great numbers, large buildings, vast resources, degrees, endorsements, name recognition, high visibility, and so on. The church of Jesus Christ has never enjoyed a position of prominence among the religions of the world. The absolute predestinarian Primitive Baptist churches do not even make a blip on the radar screen of religion. It is not because they are wrong. It is not because they are

way-out radicals. It is not because the times we live in are so evil. It is not because the Old School Baptists are slack in bearing witness to the truth of the gospel of Christ. It is because the Lord of hosts has determined it.

The number of members of gospel churches is as fixed as the number of hairs on one’s head. Sometimes we are tempted to despise ourselves because of our meager numbers, but when we despise the day of small things we despise the work of our Sovereign Lord.

We have no apology to make to anyone for the fact that we are the least among all the nations. The same God who led Gideon forth with a band of 300 men bearing trumpets and earthen vessels with torches, and routed the enemies of Israel in the night of their confusion, is the God who leads His little flock today.

“For they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth.” There is a certain, predestinated people who “shall rejoice” to view the glorious and mysterious work of God building and sustaining His church. They are the “lively stones” who “are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2.5).” Their number is certain and their rejoicing is sure. Though they are an afflicted and poor people, a people who have tribulation, who must endure hardness, who are troubled by their many adversaries, yet they are given to see all things working together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose. They know by faith that, if God be for us, none can be against us. They are shown by grace that in all their afflictions, they are more than conquerors through Him that loved them.

These blessed ones shall rejoice because they “shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel.” The plummet is the tool used to make the walls of Zion straight. It is interesting that the root word for plummet means “to divide, separate, distinguish, differ, select, to make or put difference, divide asunder, make separate, sever out.” When Jesus Christ sets the lively stones of His spiritual house in their places He employs His distinguishing grace. He separates the precious from the vile. He separates the elect soul from his mother’s womb and calls him by

His grace. He brings not peace, but a sword. He divides fathers and sons, mothers and daughters.

This root word for plummet refers to the smelting process which forms the alloy for the plummet. Again, it seems to bring to mind the trial of the saints' faith. The saints "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls (1 Peter 1.5-9)." The plummet is in the hand of Zerubbabel, our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Separator, the Builder, the Straightener, the Author and Finisher of the house of God. The confusion which confounded the builders of the Tower of Babel cannot influence this building, for the Builder is One, even the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

I have only hinted at the richness of this vision of Zechariah. May the Lord direct our minds and hearts into the further contemplation of His glorious truth. May He bless us to see the plummet in the hand of our Lord and to rejoice.

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THE TWO THIEVES

Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left (Matthew 27.38).

Most Bible students believe these two thieves, crucified with Christ, had opposite destinies. One, say they, entered paradise that day with Jesus; the other was swept away to a reprobate's grim death. One reason given for these conclusions is, the Scriptures abound in contrasts and pairs of opposites. Examples are, Jacob and Esau; Cain and Abel; David and Goliath; sheep and goats; tares and wheat; the wise and the foolish; two in the field—one taken and the other left. There are others, but this serves to illustrate. This comparison is not conclusive, but deserves serious consideration.

Another reason that carries some force is the arrangement of the thieves. One thief was on the right hand; the other was on the left of Jesus. Such is the arrangement when Christ shall separate the sheep from the goats. This too merits consideration.

The conclusions in this article, however, are based solely on what the Scriptures say, not on inferences, illustrations or long held, popular notions. It is not important, personally, if the two thieves are both saved, both lost, or one saved and the other lost. All that can be important now is, what does the word of God say on the subject? There are no novel doctrines herein to toy with. There is no axe to grind. What is the word of God to us relative to each thief? That is the question to be answered here.

The time frame

The death of the two thieves paralleled the foremost moment in the history of mankind. It was the specific hour, determined from eternity, for the slaying of the Lamb of God. The eternal sacrifice was offered. Stupendous events affirmed the awful episode. The old world, with all its types and shadows, was passing away; the new world was ushering in with blessings and redemption. The two thieves, wholly unaware of the unfolding scene, were exactly in the middle of what may be called ground zero. Surely they were not there by accident. Neither chance nor bad luck had landed them in this dramatic

event. Neither was their part in this episode trivial. No! Each person; each event, was a piece of the whole fabric woven together at Calvary. The High Priests, the Roman soldiers, the motley mob, the frightened disciples, the two thieves, were all gathered together to fulfill their part in the death of the Son of God, Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Each individual and every event was etched in the predestinated scroll (Acts 4.25-28).

No person, and no event, may be dismissed or ignored. A careful examination of the record, though brief, of the two thieves is thus in order, entirely as much as the record of all other parties then present.

The Four Records

The first four books of the New Testament contain many events in the life and death of Christ our Lord. Some are recorded in only one book. That does not mean they are of no importance but that their significance was passed by when the Spirit led the other three writers to pen their books. Some events are recorded in two books. This provides us with a varied account, though often the two records are nearly word for word. When an event is detailed in three of the records there are usually insights gained from the three which would be missing otherwise. For those matters found in all four books we must attach the highest significance. Even though, there are times that the four *seem* to be in conflict, and additional diligence must be given.

The account of these two thieves is found in each of the four books which begin the New Testament. To the best of this writer's knowledge, nothing more is said of them. Attention will now be given to the four records, but for reasons that will shortly be apparent, not in the order they appear.

John 19.17, 18

"And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst (John 19.17, 18)."

Other than the mention of the breaking of the thieves legs, verse 32, nothing more is said by John regarding them. John's witness was chiefly occupied with Christ's interrogation before Pilate, the parting

of His raiment by lots which the soldiers cast; Jesus saying to His mother, "Woman, behold thy son!" and saying "I thirst" and "It is finished." It should be mentioned that Jesus spoke to His mother prior to saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? Which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" as recorded in Mark 15.34 and Matthew 27.46. This took place at the ninth hour of the day. Except for this one brief mention in John of the thieves, he says nothing more of them. We can learn from John that Jesus died between two thieves but nothing more.

Matthew 27.38

"Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left (Matthew 27.38)."

Matthew's record differs little from that of John. Additionally, Matthew records the vilification and calumny Jesus received from those passing by on the road, from the chief priests, scribes and elders and finally the two thieves. "The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth (verse 44)."

It is worthy of note, both thieves were at this time engaging in the vile treatment of Jesus as He hung upon the cross. Beyond this, Matthew has nothing more to say relative to the thieves.

It can be seen from the records of John and Matthew, little can be learned of the two thieves. Only Matthew describes them as thieves (as does Mark, which shall be seen). Only Matthew relates their bitter denunciation of Jesus. Despite the brevity, the account of the two thieves was important enough to be mentioned by both these writers.

Luke 23.32,33; 39-43.

"And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left (Luke 23.32, 33)."

Luke gives a fuller account here and in the verses following, verses 39-43. It is from Luke's record we find that which has been held dear by believers for centuries; the description of the solemn, though brief, exchange between Jesus and the malefactors.

Interestingly, Luke never calls these two dying miscreants thieves. He uses the word malefactors, the primary meanings of which is, 1. One guilty of a heinous offence against the law; a felon, a criminal. 2. An evil-doer; one who does ill towards another; esp. in antithesis with benefactor. (*Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition, 1999)

The arrangement of positioning Jesus between the two thieves measurably brings the attitude of the enemies of Jesus into focus. By crucifying Jesus of Nazareth at the same time as the two robbers would seem to strengthen their argument He was equally worthy of death as were the thieves.

These two evil-doers were not simply common pilferers. Stealing would be only one of many crimes for which they were probably guilty. Our Lord's final hours, then, were kept in company with two of the baser sort. These were heinous offenders; felons; evil doers.

Can the contrast be more vivid? Painted on the canvas of public opinion was the brightest and the darkest of humanity. Between two malefactors, men who dissipated their lives in wanton abandonment, hung dying also the pure, holy, innocent, and perfect Son of God. On either side of Jesus, the right and the left, hung a son of Adam, each fully gorged with wickedness and self-gratification. All that is worthy of heaven had been nailed to a cross between two plunderers, themselves worthy of eternal flames and ruination.

Little wonder, then, the heavens became dark as a sable robe, that the Father drew the curtain of affinity between Himself and His dying Son. Truly, this was the hour of unholy darkness. Satan's boldest stroke seemed severe in the extreme. Jesus hung between two of Satan's foulest sons. Nevertheless, the wise purposes of God were unfolding with divine approval.

These two malefactors, or thieves, were probably common robbers who occupied the hills and high-ways surrounding Jerusalem and other cities. They were often seen in bands sufficient in number to terrify even a troop of Roman soldiers. It was such plunderers that are mentioned in Luke 10.30: "And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves...." It is possible, though without proof, that these two

thieves were numbered among those of whom Jesus spoke. No matter, these were characters that had abandoned all respect for society and its requirements. Their punishment by death was just, even by their own admission (Luke 23.41).

In Luke's account of the crucifixion is found the first recorded words Jesus spoke while on the cross. They were spoken immediately after the mention of the two malefactors in verse 33. "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots (Luke 23.34)."

Many Bible students have troubled themselves endlessly about the extent of this prayer of Jesus. Some feel He was speaking of Judas, the High Priest, Herod, Pilate, the Roman soldiers and all others involved in His death, from the least to the greatest. If this prayer was indeed unlimited, it might well have included the two thieves, but that is not for us to speculate on.

What we may be certain of is, all for whom the prayer was intended were forgiven, as the Lord requested of His Father.

As the hours of agony drew on, there came the railing insults from one of the malefactors. (Both did so at first, Mathew 27.44) This was just prior to the sixth hour, so they had been on the crosses for some time.

A brief review describing the lives of these two railing thieves seems compelling. Their miserable lives were ebbing away on a Roman cross; the ultimate punishment for those deemed unfit to live according to Roman law. (Between them hung the most detested Jew who ever lived, according to popular belief, a belief fanned by the malicious hatred eating at the hearts of the High Priest and those in his company.)

If these thieves had family or friends in attendance we are not informed. What we do know is, the society of the day had bid them a terse farewell and good riddance. From society's viewpoint these rogues were unworthy of further life. They lived an undisciplined life of wanton abandonment. They were to die an unmourned death. If there had been a speck of worth or value in their miserable lives, no record of it is found. Beyond the gathering at Calvary, few knew, and probably fewer cared, that

these two malefactors were being dispatched by a most agonizing death into eternity.

Another point of considerable interest is, despite the notoriety the two received as an after-testimony of their death, we do not even know their names. Were they Jews or Gentiles? Nothing more is known of them than the brief records the four writers have left us. Yet, despite the limits of these records, the story of the dying thieves has been held dear to the children of God for centuries.

This is the rest of the story:

Luke 23.39-43

“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou are in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss (Luke 23.39-41).” Whatever else may be said of this amazing event, all must concur that the exchange of conversation during the crucifixion was astounding.

Suddenly, the two thieves no longer held a united opinion of Christ. Even more amazing is the brief time in which the breach occurs between them relative to Jesus. Matthew is specific in pointing out it was thieves, plural, which cast the same in his teeth, Matthew 27.44. Matthew 27.45 then says, “Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.” This fixes the time when the thief spoke to Jesus prior to the sixth hour, or at least thereabouts. How or why one of the thieves suddenly recanted his opinion is not at all difficult to understand. At the appointed time, in God’s eternal plan, one of the thieves gave audible and visible evidence of an inward change. “Who maketh thee to differ?”

What these two renegades knew of Jesus; what they had heard of Him, or from His lips, cannot be known. There simply is no record to which we may turn. We cannot even be sure they had even the slightest knowledge of Him prior to this moment, though that seems doubtful. We may be sure of one thing; there was nothing at the moment, viewing Christ in His dreadful circumstances, that would incline normal reasoning to conclude He was indeed

God; that this was the long-awaited Saviour of the Jews. Yet the record of Isaiah, written over 700 years earlier, was being fulfilled at that very moment: “As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men (Isaiah 52.14).”

Would anyone conclude this was the Messiah, unless God Himself so revealed it? From every appearance, Jesus was no more than another dying victim of Roman oppression over the nations. Beaten, bloodied, abandoned; alone and forsaken. Neither the unaided eye, the natural intellect, nor common sense could possibly see in the tragic scene the full work of redemption being culminated in the death of Jesus of Nazareth. But the thief saw through all the dreadful occurrence and called upon his King.

The Petition

“And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom (Luke 23.42).” Having rebuked his criminal compatriot (verse 40), the thief turns his final dying focus to his only hope. Reader, picture this event: here is a man who squandered life to the extreme. Not one complimentary assertion is available to hint at any worth in this debauched wastrel. This plea would have all the makings of a petition in extreme futility were it recorded anywhere except in the Bible. But here it is! Three dying men; all condemned as public enemies. One of them sees in another what most likely is the first glimmer of hope he ever entertained of better things. Suddenly, he cries out, “Lord, remember me!” The Eternal Rememberer had been petitioned.

Several things are strongly suggested in “Lord, remember me.” The thief saw in Jesus authority. “Lord,” he calls Him. If he properly understood the Lordship of Jesus seems unimportant. What he saw was one to whom he could address his last and only hope. What he hoped Jesus might perform for him not another soul on earth could do. Moreover, the thief expresses this supplication when every other hope could only be considered folly. How much, or how little, the thief saw of the deity of Jesus is not at issue. What is sure is, the thief sought the help of Jesus, which is unassailable proof God had first wrought in him a lively spirit. “Remember me.” Does this not strongly suggest the thief believed that

Jesus would be capable of remembrance, even after His death on the cross? Why else would he say such? Again, this lends credible support to the idea his understanding had been influenced by divine power.

No person of reasonable intelligence can concoct a theory, worth any consideration, to explain the thief turning to Jesus for hope except by pure, free grace.

“When thou comest into thy kingdom.” Only kings possess kingdoms! The thief recognized Jesus as a king; a king entering *into* His kingdom through death. Few, if any, have ever been blessed with such a radiant view of the full glory of Jesus as was here displayed.

Salvation had visited this trio at Calvary. How fitting! Since salvation has flowed forth from Calvary for centuries, it seems proper for it to begin there, and so it did! “And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

Few Bible students deny this thief was transported to the presence of Jesus that day, no matter what they understand paradise to mean. Death swiftly hastened on, but joy unspeakable awaited the thief beyond the reach of death, the last enemy. Everlasting union with Jesus, King of Kings, satisfied the petition of the dying thief beyond all expectations. This was one sinner who was assured of eternal joy though he had nothing of value with which to bargain. This profligate was totally void of good works. He had no baptism, no law keeping. He was destitute of any claims on heaven. But, he had the sure promise of Jesus. So then, we consider his case happily closed. At some point, though obscured from public view, he was quickened into spiritual life; was blessed to repent, confess, believe and die in hope of eternal life. The Lord was his Shepherd.

The second thief

There were *two* thieves crucified with Jesus. Of the one, we feel sure he rests securely with his Saviour evermore. Near unanimous opinion, however, consigns the other thief to the dark regions of eternal torment. And, so it would appear from what we have so far examined in the word of God. But, there is more, and it must be considered as well.

May the Lord enable us to lay aside prejudice and long held opinions, for all the facts, if any are

available. Next to be considered is the record of Mark.

Mark 15.27,28

“And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, and he was numbered with the transgressors (Mark 15.27, 28).” Mark’s record differs from that of Matthew, Luke and John by relating that these events fulfilled the Scriptures, specifically, Isaiah 53.12. Since Mark 15 refers to Isaiah 53.12, a point beyond question, then whatever can be learned there (Isaiah 53) must be conclusive in determining the final end of the two thieves, unless other Scriptures can be produced to prove the contrary. There is no other record of the two thieves beyond what is here offered, thus this cannot be done.

“Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (Isaiah 52.12).” See first from Isaiah that the word, *transgressors*, is used twice in the second clause of the verse. First, it was said that he was numbered with the transgressors, and second it was said that he made intercession for the transgressors.

Unless it can be proved that Isaiah was speaking of two distinct sets of transgressors, an improbable task, then what is said throughout the verse, applicable to transgressors, applies equally to *both* uses of the word.

In Mark 15.27 the two were described as thieves, then in verse 28 they were called transgressors. Clearly the thieves of verse 27 and the transgressors of verse 28 are the same persons. Only dishonesty or ignorance (or both) can twist the meaning to say otherwise. Furthermore, Mark 15.28 says, speaking of the thieves of verse 27 and the transgressors of verse 28 (the very same persons), that the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, “And he was numbered with the transgressors.” Therefore, this conclusion must be drawn—whatever Isaiah intended regarding those (transgressors) with whom Christ was crucified was intended of them *both!* This is fundamental. We

cannot deny the thieves are called *thieves, plural*, and they are called *transgressors, plural*. So then, whatever is said of *thieves, plural*, and whatever is said of *transgressors, plural*, must be said of both, unless evidence proves otherwise. (The argument that Mark only quotes the second reference to transgressors when affirming the Scripture was fulfilled will be treated shortly.)

A few words concerning the whole of Isaiah 53 are needful, for nowhere in the Old Testament, except possibly Psalm 22, is the death of Christ narrated more vividly. Verse 4 speaks of Him bearing *our* griefs and carrying *our* sorrows. All the elect are meant here. Verse 5 speaks of Him being wounded for *our* transgressions and bruised for *our* iniquities. Again, all the elect. Verse 6 mentions the *sheep* going astray; again, all the elect. Verse 7 speaks of the declaration of His *generation* and being stricken for the transgressions of His *people*. Once more the whole of the election are included. In verse 10 we are told He shall see His *seed*. The elect are His seed. Verse 11 says He will justify *many* and bear *their* iniquities. The *many* and the *their* are one with the elect. These few identities are sufficient to establish the point; the prophet was speaking by Divine direction of the elect, inclusively, and only the elect, exclusively. So too shall we find matters in verse 12, where the transgressors are mentioned twice.

Isaiah's first mention of the transgressors in verse 12 was that "he [Christ] was numbered with the transgressors" and his second mention is "...and made intercession for the transgressors." Moreover, between these two references to the transgressors he said, "...and he bare the sin of many." Can the honest reader possibly conclude Isaiah was referring to two, and possibly three distinct groups of persons? Is it probable that the first mention of transgressors is no way connected to the second mention of transgressors in the very same verse? Is there anything in all of Isaiah 53 to lead one to think that those many for whom Christ bare their sins excludes one, or both, the transgressors twice mentioned in this one verse? Certainly not!

Even were it admitted that possibly Isaiah did not intend the transgressors to be included in the "and he bare the sin of many" it would surely make Isaiah

appear to have little grasp of the meaning of what he was trying to say. Furthermore, the intercession for the transgressors would seem highly out of place if it was not a priestly prayer for His (Christ's) own, the same as those for whom He bare their sins. This is a strange text indeed if the transgressors first mentioned were not the same as the transgressors last mentioned. And finally, since the two thieves in Mark 15 are denominated transgressors, plural, and twice in Isaiah 53.12 they are also called transgressors, plural, it can only mean that both were beneficiaries of whatever Jesus did for one. These are the facts emanating from the two texts, no matter the entrenched opinions and preconceived notions about these two transgressors, also called malefactors and thieves.

The thieves' conduct on the cross

While the texts in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John indicate no repentance or conviction on the part of the other thief, the absence of such cannot outweigh the positive evidence of the wording of Isaiah 53. It must be concluded therefrom that Jesus made intercession for *both* transgressors with whom He was numbered. Moreover, the text also requires the admission that Jesus bare their (both transgressors) sins, despite what we may, or may not, know of their dying hours.

Many have proclaimed amazing grace when contemplating the apparent repentance of the one thief. Perhaps, where sin abounded, grace did *much more abound* than we might have first thought. So the record indicates when read without prejudice.

It has been suggested Jesus made intercession for only one thief and those who crucified Him, thus His prayer, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." This is possible, but not what the record reveals. The extent of the intercessory prayer of Jesus cannot by us be fully known now. It may include those who drove the nails in His body. It may include the mob, the priests, the Roman soldiers; one or two of the transgressors or thieves. It surely includes all for whom the Lord intended. But what does all that prove? Did the mob, the soldiers, the priests or anyone else exhibit any more repentance than the one thief? Because the evidence is not revealed does not mean it does not exist, for it must, unless it can be proven the intercessory prayer was

spoken *only* for the one thief or transgressor. But, and notice well, Isaiah said he made intercession for the transgressors, *plural*. Since the only persons directly described as transgressors were the two thieves then certainly, certainly they two *at least* must be included. Both of them! Mark says the Scripture (Isaiah 53.12) was fulfilled when Jesus was numbered with the transgressors. Whoever these transgressors are (Mark says they are the two thieves) Isaiah says Jesus made intercession for them.

Although it may be difficult for some to swallow, this is the clear, positive, and only conclusion that can be drawn from an honest comparison of the two texts. The first mention of transgressors in Isaiah cannot be less than the two thieves or Mark was mistaken. And, since it is positive that both mentions of transgressors in Isaiah 53.12 are mutually the same, then Christ did indeed make intercession for both those with whom He was crucified. The construction of Isaiah 53.12 requires the careful reader to acknowledge that if this text is the one to which Mark refers, then both thieves (transgressors/malefactors) died with a hope of glory, while only one was mentioned as having confessed Christ.

If you accept the view that Matthew 21.29-34; Mark 10.46-52, and Luke 18.35-43 are speaking of the same incident, the healing of blind Bartimaeus, then you have a parallel situation. You cannot know that Bartimaeus had a companion that was healed unless you couple the texts of Luke and Mark with that of Matthew. Taken together, the story is clear; there must be two blind men healed.

When Isaiah 53 is viewed with Mark 15 it is difficult to deny the deliverance of both transgressors (thieves).

Whatever conclusions are drawn from the record, that one or both thieves were delivered, it is nevertheless, a wonderful story of amazing grace. The facts are, neither thief, nor any of us, has any claim on the mercy of God. Heaven shall be home for all the election of grace. None of them can or will be finally lost.

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REGENERATION WITHOUT MEANS

By the term “regeneration without means,” we mean that God regenerates His children, or they are born of God, by the direct operation of the Holy Spirit of God without any human means, human instrumentality, or human effort, either on the part of the sinner who is being regenerated, or the effort of preachers, missionaries, “soul winners,” “personal workers,” praying loved ones, or anyone else using Bibles, prayer, good literature, gospel tracts, scare tactics, sweet music, or anything else, whatever the nature. The children of God are regenerated, or *born again*, to use the term Jesus used in speaking to Nicodemus, by the Holy Spirit with no intermediate agency. Neither God nor man uses the Bible, preachers or preaching, or any other means, whether human, earthly, angelic, or anything else in all creation to bring about the new birth.

On page 20 of each issue of *The Remnant*, our Principle Number Seven states: “The sovereign, irresistible, effectual work of the Holy Spirit in quickening the elect of God; the new birth is by the direct operation of the Holy Spirit without the use of any means.” This principle we delight to defend. We also state (on page 20), “We believe these principles are, in the main, harmonious with the articles of faith published by predestinarian associations and churches of the old order of Baptists known as Primitive, Particular, or Old School Baptists the world over.” Nor has any such Primitive Baptist ever challenged *The Remnant’s* writers on this point, nor will they. It is a settled fact that Primitive Baptists believe that God imparts spiritual life by a sovereign, direct, creative act without any human or angelic assistance or participation.

Old Old Baptists do not need this review, we realize, while hoping nonetheless that they will find some of these observations of interest. Whatever others might be who believe in “Gospel Regeneration,” they are not Old School or Primitive Baptists. They might even rejoice that they are not. If they do, so be it; we rejoice with them.

John 1.11-13 says, “He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which

were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Whether you believe “His own” refers to all of His elect family or only to national Israel, it matters not, so much as the fact that His own did not and would not receive Him. But the text says that some **did** receive Him because they were—they had been—born of God prior to their receiving Him, without any help from blood line, human will, flesh, mankind, or anything man might think he can contribute to bring about God’s work.

Even as *generating* is the act of an earthly father, *regenerating* is the sovereign act of God the Father. Being born again, or more accurately being *born from above* (see any Greek dictionary on **ανωθεν**, John 3.3, 7), is the result of that regeneration, God’s impartation of divine life to the spiritually dead object of His love and grace.

“Gospel regeneration”

“Gospel regeneration” is the false doctrine that sinners are regenerated by the preaching of the gospel (or more generally the preaching of the Scriptures), or that a sinner’s hearing the preaching of the gospel is an absolute necessity without which he cannot be born again or regenerated.

“Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou (Ecclesiastes 8.4)?” Every self-styled “soul-winner” thinks he can tap into this power, by merely quoting what God has said. Then he who would work the works of God is baffled when the hardened old sinner to whom he quoted a Bible verse or two does not fall down before him, crying out in tearful repentance. This is the gospel regeneration doctrine gone to seed.

In the last analysis, one who believes in gospel regeneration cannot do other than try to take the credit that is justly due to Christ alone for the salvation of His people, and divide the praise and glory between the Lord Jesus Christ, the Bible, and the preacher. It matters not how much lip service one gives to the sovereignty of God and “the five points of Calvinism.” The one who believes and teaches the gospel regeneration theory necessarily joins with all the ranks of Arminianism in saying, “God has done His part; now we must do ours, or the atonement of Christ is of no avail.” Such a one denies that God has an elect multitude in every kindred, tribe, and tongue,

redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. He denies Jesus’ doctrine, “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear **my** voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd (John 10.16).” In place of this plain statement of Christ, such a one would need to substitute, “...them also the preacher must bring, if they shall hear the preacher’s voice.” In effect he must say God only has a people where the gospel minister has preached the Bible.

The advocates of the “means of grace” system of salvation necessarily deny the new covenant promise of God: “But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jeremiah 31.33f).” The means advocate would need this text to say something like this: “And they **shall** teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, when the preacher does his part, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more if they hear the gospel preached.”

The gospel is, by definition, good news. There is a marked difference between the salvation wrought by the blood and imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ and the announcement of it, which is the gospel preached in its purity. If a rich man pays a pauper’s debt and opens a million-dollar account in his name, the deed is an accomplished fact, it is done, no matter whether the destitute person hears about it for a while or not. There is and must be a distinction between the deed and the news about the deed. It is not the news a preacher brings that delivers a soul from death, it is what Christ has actually done which redeems, regenerates, and saves.

The ones who preach the gospel regeneration theory and constantly bray about God’s loving and wanting to save everyone have a lot of explaining to do.

If God uses the Bible to regenerate people, He surely went about things in a strange manner.

If God needs the Bible to get people born again, then why did He not provide His Book to the whole race in Adam's day? From Adam to Moses, for 2,500 years, there were no Scriptures. No one could have been regenerated for those 2,500 years, no, not a one, if gospel regeneration is true. Those two and a half millennia embraced the entire population of all the earth, all without a Bible, for the first forty percent of the 6,000 years from Adam's time to ours. How odd, if gospel regeneration is true.

If God requires the Bible to bring spiritual life to His people, we are left to conclude that He had no elect vessels of mercy before Moses penned the first five books of the Old Testament—the first suggestion of a Bible. Then, from Moses to the book of Acts, another 1,500 years, except for a few isolated cases like Jonah at Nineveh and Daniel in Babylon, there was no Scripture or scriptural preaching for the Gentiles.

Why did He not at least give the Bible to Noah and his family when they got off the ark? And when He finally did give it, why did He only give it to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and not also give it to the Orientals, the Europeans, the Indians of the Americas, the natives of Africa, and the occupants of the South Sea islands? Whole continents were left for centuries without exposure to the Missionary scheme of salvation. Certainly He neither loved any of those people nor desired to have any of them born into His heavenly kingdom, if gospel regeneration were true.

Must we then conclude that the Most High God had no children among the Jews or the Gentiles until He made some Bible verses for men to work with? Shall we also presume God cannot now regenerate coolies and slaves in the hinterlands of Communist China because we can't get a Bible and a missionary to them? Shall we suppose that God never had an elect vessel of mercy among the aborigines before a preacher arrived with Bible in tow?

In truth, the Missionary movement originated in Hell, and with it came the error of gospel regeneration. They both got their impetus when the rich man suggested that, if someone would preach ("testify," he said) to his lost brothers, they would be saved from

going to Hell. "Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment (Luke 16.27f)." The doctrine of the rich man in Hell goes hand in glove with the gospel regeneration theory.

"Born Again" and "Being Saved"

One major source of this error is that people carelessly use the terms "born again" "new birth," or "regeneration" interchangeably with "saved" or "salvation," as though these terms all mean the same thing. They do not and cannot.

By blurring the distinction between regeneration and salvation, men have left the door wide open for numerous heresies. The particular error we are addressing here has historically been called "gospel regeneration," and to accommodate this discussion it is in this sense we use the word *regeneration* in this article.

In nature, one must be born naturally before he can be saved naturally. Some may have been saved from drowning, others from a burning building, or from disease. This "being saved" could not ordinarily have occurred if they had not been born first.

One might object: "A child's life can be saved at the time of its birth, as when a baby's umbilical cord is wrapped about its throat and is suffocating him. He is born but must be saved immediately." This type of objection only goes to prove more clearly that birth, either natural or spiritual, and salvation, either natural or spiritual, are two entirely different things which may or may not take place at about the same time.

"Word" or "word"?

A second major source or cause of this error is that people carelessly use the term "word," meaning the printed or written word (the Scriptures, the Bible), interchanging it with the living Word, Jesus Christ. In *The Remnant*, we always customarily try to provide initial capitals for the words *Bible* and *Scriptures*, but we do not ordinarily provide a capital to introduce the word *word* when it is applied to the Bible as in the phrase, *the word of God*. We are not always successful, but we do try to observe this convention, reserving *Word* with a capital W for

Jesus Christ, the living Word (see John 1.1, Revelation 19.13). We do this as precisely as we are enabled because of the confusion which arises when missionary-minded people write things like, “We are born again by the Word,” and we know full well they mean that people are regenerated by the Bible. We would have no problem whatsoever with the statement, “We are born again by the Word,” if it were clearly understood that the Word under consideration is Jesus Christ and not the preached gospel.

Words are powerful, but the power is not in the words. The power is in the Spirit behind the words. When Jesus spoke to Lazarus, He spoke life directly to him. Had Peter or John used the exact same words, it would have changed nothing. Lazarus, being physically dead, was a figure or picture of the sinner’s spiritual death in sins.

“The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life (John 6.63b).” The emphasis is on the speaker, not the words. If it is Jesus speaking the words, they are spirit and life. If it is man speaking the same words, they are not spirit and life. Those who doubt this should prove their position—that a man’s quoting Christ or the Bible is the same as God’s speaking—by going to some convenient cemetery and raising the dead by saying, “Lazarus, come forth.” If the power is in the words Christ said, you should have no trouble raising the dead. We have issued this challenge before, and, Lord willing, we will continue to do so: If you do raise the dead by speaking to them as Jesus did, please let us know. If you do not, we aver it is because you cannot. And, as the physical realm is inferior to the spiritual, if we cannot raise the physically dead by speaking words to them, how much less can we raise the spiritually dead?

Search the Scriptures

“Search the Scriptures,” Jesus said (John 5.39). Verify your doctrine. “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so (Acts 17.11).” If gospel regeneration were so, then search and tell us: Where do the Scriptures teach that the Bible gives eternal life? They do not. The preaching of the Scriptures has to do with salvation, not regeneration.

“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. (John 5.39).” Such language as “ye **think** ye have eternal life...” usually means someone thinks something wrongly. Christ certainly meant so here. The Pharisees (the Jews, verse 18) thought—that is, they were of the opinion—that they had eternal life in the Scriptures.

The problem of anyone’s thinking we have eternal life in the Bible occurs when we follow the Arminians’ confusing lead, jumbling salvation and regeneration together and mistaking the living Word of God, Christ Jesus, with the written word of God, the Bible. As Jesus said, the written word was given to testify of the living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ (Psalm 40.7).

Since Jesus bid those to whom He spoke to search the Scriptures, and the Bereans were commended for doing exactly that, we would now turn to several passages of Scripture to examine exactly what they do and do not say.

1. First, consider **Psalm 19.7-11**: Although many quote it to support the notion that God has placed regenerating power in the Bible, this passage does not say what they claim for it: “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.”

You will note that *the Law of the Lord*, which is part of the written word of God, *converts the soul; it does not regenerate the spirit*. “The testimony of the Lord,” which this text is, “is sure, making wise the simple.”

“The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.” All the light in the universe enlightening the blind eye does not give sight to the blind, but “The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them (Proverbs 20.12).” These He gives in the regeneration of His people. Only then is the Bible “...a lamp unto my

feet, and a light unto my path (Psalm 119.105).” Only when God gives life and sight to the dead and the blind, only then will they rejoice in Christ Jesus, the Light of the world.

“The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether....by them is Thy servant warned”; it is not the Devil’s servant who is warned.

“In keeping of them there is great reward”; a blow, in passing, at Conditionalism. There is great reward *in* keeping God’s judgments, not *for* keeping them. The Scriptures do not regenerate, but they are totally consistent.

2. Romans 1.16 says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” But that is salvation to the believer, not regeneration to the unbeliever. Paul never says the preached gospel is the power of God unto regeneration.

3. “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God (1 Corinthians. 1.18).” This text literally says, “...us who are being saved.” Being born of the Spirit is a one-time experience while being saved is ongoing.

4. In verse 21 Paul continues the thought: “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” It did not please God by the foolishness of preaching to regenerate the unbelievers. One of the apostle’s major points here is that preaching does nothing for the unbeliever. It is foolishness to him. How much foolishness must be preached to an unbeliever before it makes sense to him?

5. “Us which are called (1 Corinthians 1.23f)”: How do the called ones get life? God gives it to them. How? Some say by “the gospel call.” But that will not stand the test; it is an argument in a circle, weighed and found wanting: “God sends the gospel to call the dead, who cannot hear the call, in order to give them life so they can hear the call”? No. A babe does not hear in order to be born; it is born, then hears its parent’s call.

6. Another text our opponents love to quote is, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10.17).” But they will not

have the next verse where Paul immediately continues, “But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world (Romans 10.17-18).” Neither apostles nor gospel preachers had gone to the ends of the world when Paul wrote this, but the Holy Spirit had, taking God’s message to His people in the farthest reaches of the earth.

7. “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.” But Abraham had no Bible, no “Scripture.” Who preached to Abraham, then? “Now **the LORD had said unto Abram...**(Genesis 12.1).” Jehovah Himself spoke directly to him, even as He does to all His children.

8. For some reason, proponents of the gospel regeneration theory love to quote Isaiah 55.10-11 to us, as though that text proves God uses the Bible to regenerate the spiritually dead sinner. The text says nothing of the kind. It says: “For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it (Isaiah 55.10f).” If this text says the Bible is the instrument whereby God regenerates sinners, we fail to see it.

His word accomplishes what HE pleases, not what the Bible-quoter pleases. Millions of “soul-winners” try, wishing these verses applied to them, but they do not. Sometimes, preaching brings about the exact opposite effect of what the preacher intends and desires.

His word accomplishes what HE pleases, and that applies to far more than regenerating His children. It applies to His creation and everything in it. “For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast (Psalm 33.9).” Ah, all ye who believe it is your preaching and witnessing that regenerates dead alien sinners, don’t you wish you **really** had that kind of power?

His word accomplishes what HE pleases, and that applies to far more than the Bible. Jesus said, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by

every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God (Matthew 4.4).” Our physical life, and the universe, together with all creation, are sustained by what God speaks in His providence. All is upheld by the word of His power (Hebrews 1.3).

9. “It is the spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing (John 6.63a).” Would this not have been the ideal time for Christ Jesus to have said, if it were true, “It is the Bible that quickeneth, and the flesh that preaches it profiteth quite a bit”?

10. Matthew 16.17: “Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” Would not this have been the ideal time for Christ to have said, if it were true, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: My Father hath **not** revealed it unto thee. This is the very reason I came to earth and took upon myself this body of **flesh and blood**, so I could teach you and preach to you, and get you to hear and understand these things and believe them, and be born from above.”

11. **Cornelius in Acts the tenth chapter:** We rejoice in the fact that Cornelius and those with him worshiped the Lord God before Peter ever preached to them! Cornelius was “A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always (Acts 10.2).”

Job said, “And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding (Job 28.28).” “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111.10).” “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding (Proverbs 9.10).” “The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom (Proverbs 15.33).” “And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the Lord is His treasure (Isaiah 33.6).” As the fear of the Lord is wisdom, and Christ is unto His people “the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1.24, 30),” even so Cornelius and also all his household (remember, he feared God “with all his house”) were already identified with Christ, and that eternally, before he ever sent for Peter.

*He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, **Cornelius** (verse 3).* Jesus, as the Good Shepherd of His sheep, said: “The sheep hear His voice: and He calleth His own sheep **by name**,

and leadeth them out...them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice...(John 10.3, 16).” Did God call Cornelius by name? Did Cornelius hear His voice?

A devout man...which gave much alms to the people.... Some have alleged that this was the work of the flesh, an attempt on the part of a heathen man to earn salvation from God. If such were the case, then why did God, instead of condemning Cornelius for his carnality, rather commend him, saying, “Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God (verse 4)”? God said this to him because his alms and prayers could only have been produced by God’s own working in Cornelius “to will and to do of His good pleasure (Philippians 2.13).”

—C. C. Morris

(To be continued, if the Lord wills)

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We believe these principles are, in the main, harmonious with the articles of faith published by predestinarian associations and churches of the old order of Baptists known as Primitive, Particular, or Old School Baptists the world over.

1—The eternal existence, sovereignty, immutability, omnipotence, and perfections of Jehovah God; He has revealed Himself as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and these sacred Three are One; Jesus Christ was and is God manifest in the flesh, and in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;

2—The Old and New Testaments in their original languages are the verbally inspired word of God, and they are the complete and only valid guide of faith and practice; the King James Version is the preferred English translation;

3—The will of the eternal God is the first cause of all causes;

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5—The eternal personal election of the redeemed in Christ, before the world began, and their eternal, vital union with Him; their number is fixed, certain, and sure, and can neither be increased nor diminished; their fall in their federal head Adam into spiritual death, total depravity, and just condemna-

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