

Without Excuse

"For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world His eternal power and deity (divinity) have been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse"—Rom. 1:19-20 ARV.

THUS PAUL declares that all around us there is evidence of God for those who desire to see. There is "no excuse" for ignoring God's existence and authority. Paul says again—

*"And He made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and boundaries of their habitation, **that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after Him and find Him.**"*

"Yet He is not far from each one of us, for 'In Him we live and move and are'" (Acts 17:26-28)

And David says (Psa. 19:1)—

"The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night uttereth knowledge."

This clear foundation of His reality and powers is laid by God in the sight of all men. What men next require are concrete facts concerning God's purpose with man and His desires concerning man—what He wants man to KNOW and what He wants man to DO.

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RELIGION CANNOT be built on feeling—that is, permanent, worthwhile religion to grow in and live by. It must have facts—realities—certainties

This is the purpose for which the Bible is given. It is a textbook of God's arrangements and requirements, and tells how man can fit himself for and into God's great plan for the future of the earth and mankind.

First of all, we would like to strongly emphasize the fact that the New Testament alone is not a sufficient revelation for salvation. This is only the last quarter of God's message to man and cannot be understood without the background of the Old Testament.

There are about 1,000 references to the Old Testament in the New. The New is built upon, and presupposes a knowledge of the Old. Jesus said to some—

*"Ye do err, **not knowing the Scriptures**" (Matt 22:29).*

He was referring to the Old Testament which was the only "Scriptures" then in existence. Again he said—

"O fools, and slow of heart to believe ALL that the prophets have spoken" (Luke 24:25).

And again (John 5:47)—

"If ye believe not Moses writings, how shall ye believe my words?"

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ANOTHER elementary point is that the Bible is a big study. We shall never get much satisfaction from it unless we are prepared to devote considerable time and effort to it.

If we do, we shall find that it slowly becomes more and more interesting and satisfying and will gradually transfer our interest from the passing things of the present to the great eternal realities of the past and future.

This is its purpose, and the whole purpose of our life. This present life is for probation and study and preparation for a future life of incomparably greater value and importance. God asks us to invest this present brief life in a glorious, endless future.

We must learn what we are, and what our needs are, and what has been done for us by the love of God. The love of God is manifested in the wonderful provision He has made in relation to the earth. As Paul says—

"God left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17).

The earth, even in its present condition, is a glorious habitation. It contains in abundance everything needed for the temporal happiness and wellbeing of man. All these things manifest God's love for man and His desire that man should reciprocate that love and draw near to Him.

But the earth, sadly enough, is not the place of happiness and plenty and love and peace that it could and should be. That, too, doubtless, has impressed all serious thinkers strongly in these recent troubled years.

It is intended to be, and it will be, for the testimony is—

*"As truly as I live, **all the earth SHALL be filled with the glory of the Lord**" (Num. 14:21).*

"And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever.

"And My people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places" (Isa 32:17).

But at present man's energies are dissipated in hate and cruelty and selfishness and desire for power and dominion over his fellowman.

What is wrong? Clearly there is something wrong with man. We know within ourselves there is something wrong with man. If we are thoughtful, we shall have noticed within ourselves natural impulses which, on a larger scale, we can perceive are the cause of all man's trouble and sorrow.

PRIDE, envy, selfishness, greed, inconsiderateness, impatience, irritability—all these, to some degree, we perceive naturally working within ourselves. We are injured, and immediately anger wells up, and we desire to retaliate and destroy. These things, developed to their logical conclusion, are the causes of murder and war.

Now these things we find within ourselves. We do not put them there. We discover them there, rooted in our natures. Often we sincerely regret the reactions they lead us to. We show by this that we recognize their undesirability.

We realize that kindness and patience and unselfishness would make a much happier world. But we find that these things do not come naturally. They are contrary to our natural impulses. So our own experience corresponds exactly with what Paul says—

"I find then a law that, when I would do good, evil is present with me" (Rom. 7:21).

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WHAT IS the point in all this? The point is to show that **man in his natural state is NOT good**; he does not by nature act in the way that is best either for himself or for mankind in general. And if he is reflective his own intelligence and observation will tell him this. But it cannot tell him why he is like this, or what the solution is.

Here is where the Bible comes in It is a message from God to man telling him all he needs to know about himself. It reveals man's history, tells why he is like he is, and the provision God has made in regard to him.

God did not create man evil. But for the development of character it was necessary that man be acquainted with both evil and good and that he learn to overcome the one and develop within himself the other.

Paul puts it very beautifully—

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God.

"For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of Him who subjected it in hope, because the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

"For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth together until now."

If we do not see the whole picture, the travailing of creation in pain and sorrow is a puzzling and disturbing thing. But when we realize that God is working out a purpose and that He subjected it to these conditions in hope, we begin to perceive its necessity and wisdom. Paul says (Rm. 5:3)—

"We rejoice in our sufferings: knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given us

"While we were yet helpless, Christ died for the ungodly."

And again (Heb. 12:7-11)—

*"It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons...He disciplines us for our good, **that we may share His holiness**. For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant: later it yields the **peaceful fruit of righteousness** to those who have been trained by it."*

This is the principle and purpose that lies behind the overall picture of things as we see them God is training His sons in holiness, and creation as we see it is laid out in reference to this purpose.

Holiness and character and love cannot be created by a mere act of power. Therein lies their value in the sight of God. They must be **developed by freewill desire** toward God on the part of creatures endowed with independent volition.

God has subjected the creation to travail for a glorious purpose that cannot be otherwise accomplished.

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WHAT is the practical bearing of all this? We are trying to lead up to what course man must follow in order to please God and promote his own happiness.

THERE IS NO TRUE, PERMANENT HAPPINESS OR SATISFACTION OUTSIDE OF PEACE AND COMMUNION WITH GOD.

Until man is at peace with God he cannot experience the happiness that God has planned for him. And this depends upon a knowledge of what God has done and revealed, and a conformity to it.

Incomparably the most important and outstanding act of God on behalf of man was the giving of His Own Son to suffer and die for man's sake. What was the purpose of this and what did it accomplish?

First of all, it provided a basis upon which God could extend His love and mercy toward man without compromising His holiness and justice.

It is primarily a **manifestation of love**—the highest and greatest manifestation of love possible. It is an advance on the part of God, seeking to stir up man's love and devotion.

Secondly, it is to provide an example and incentive for man to follow the way that is pleasing to God, demonstrating the type of life and devotion that God desires, and the benefits and divine approval and affection that result—

"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"

And Jesus said (John 8:29)—

"I do always those things that please the Father."

This is the key to happiness and satisfaction: **knowing what God desires us to do, and—to the best of our ability—complying with it.**

A third purpose of the sacrifice of Christ was to demonstrate the evilness and sinfulness and destructiveness of sin. Sin is disobedience to God's loving wise and just instructions to His children for their good and His glory and pleasure.

Sin destroys all happiness and pleasure on the part of both man and God. It destroys the communion between them, and alienates man from God. It is the root of all misery. We must be strongly impressed with this fact, and resolutely determined to avoid it at all cost. We must set ourselves to learn what God desires and to follow it.

This will not be motivated by fear, but by the enlightened conviction of the extreme repulsiveness of sin, and by the transforming love of God and overpowering desire to be near to and allied with Him who is the epitome of all that is desirable and good.

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MAN, IN his natural state, lies in sin. To a large extent, ignorant sin—he does not know that his natural way of life is displeasing to God

"The whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 John 5:19).

"All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."

"And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever . . . Love not the world, neither the things in the world" (I John 2:15-18).

Unaided, we do not and cannot know what is sin and what is the will of God. Uninstructed, we constantly offend and grieve Him, because our natural course is to follow the way of the flesh and the world (Rom. 8:13)—

"If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."

This is why He has caused the Bible to be written for our instruction. It must be our daily study, if we truly desire to be pleasing to Him. A few thoughts from the pen of David (writing, of course, under the influence of the Spirit) will illustrate the necessary course that love for God and desire to know Him and please Him will follow—

"Blessed are they that keep the Lord's testimonies, and that seek Him WITH THE WHOLE HEART. Thou hast commanded us to keep Thy precepts diligently . . .

"O, that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes! . . .

"With my whole heart I have sought Thee. O, let me not wander from Thy commandments . . . Thy word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against Thee.

"Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law . . . I will delight myself in Thy commandments, which I have loved . . .

"The earth, O Lord, is full of Thy mercy: teach me Thy statutes . . . Thou art good, and doest good.

"Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding that I may learn Thy commandments. I will never forget Thy precepts, for with them Thou hast quickened me.

"O how love I Thy law! It is my meditation all the day. How sweet are Thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

"Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage forever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart . . . GREAT PEACE HAVE THEY WHICH LOVE THY LAW."

These passages, which are all taken from Psalm 119, show the necessary frame of mind in relation to God's revelations—a wholehearted and fulltime devotion and absorption—and the importance of these revealed truths, not only as essential instruction in the way of life, but as the great and consuming interest of life and substance of pleasure and meditation. The entire Psalm is very instructive in this respect.

A daily, consistent study of the whole Bible is the ONLY way to acquire the saving and guiding and mind-transforming knowledge that brings peace.

There is a booklet, called "The Bible Companion," by which the Bible can be read through in one year—once through the Old Testament and twice through the New, because the latter is more detailed and concentrated.

We would strongly urge any who desire to know God to follow this plan of reading faithfully, prayerfully, and consistently.

Much of the reading will be difficult. Much will, to begin with, be incomprehensible and

therefore perhaps somewhat dry. This is to be expected in relation to a matter of such transcendent importance. Nothing worthwhile comes easily, and there is nothing more worthwhile than this.

Get a Bible with good, big print and read it daily, meditating upon it, praying for the enlightenment and understanding, and **putting into practice the part you understand**. This latter is essential, for God is not to be mocked. We must approach God's Word with a sincere and humble intention to learn and DO. Jesus said (John 7:17)—

"If any man will DO His will, he shall know the doctrine."

Read it with an open mind and without preconceived ideas, for much of what passes for religion and doctrine has no foundation in Scripture but is the invention of man.

On the other hand, do not jump too quickly to conclusions without comparing Scripture with Scripture. The Bible is a consistent whole when properly understood and many passages clarify other passages.

Prayer is principally a matter of thanksgiving to God and seeking His guidance as to what we should do. What we should do is plainly told us in the Bible. Praying to God for guidance or for some benefit, without doing everything we can to find out for ourselves from the source of information He has lovingly given us, would not ring true and consistent in His eyes.

There are some very plain instructions in the Bible as to what to do. If we ignore these, or do not trouble to find out about them, our prayers have no chance of recognition.

Belief of the true Gospel of salvation—the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ—and baptism into these things, are outstanding among the first things that must be attended to in order to stand in God's favor and receive His recognition and blessing.

You may say, "It does not seem fair to pray for help when I can do nothing myself." In a sense this is true, although actually we can never do anything of ourselves. It is God that "*works in us to do His will*," and gives us the power to overcome, that the glory may be all to God.

Our part is to put ourselves into that humble and teachable and truth-desiring and receptive condition that will enable God to work through and in us—to put aside our own desires and cast ourselves upon Him.

Our natural condition is perishing. We are, with the rest of the world, in the grip of sin, and of ourselves it is impossible to get out of this condition, regardless of our efforts, because our greatest efforts at best would be insufficient to entitle us to immortality. At best we are still sinners.

Our best efforts fall far short of perfection, and according to God's eternal and necessary and righteous laws, **perfection alone could ENTITLE us to endless life**. Sin and death are inseparable.

But God has, in His love, made a provision of His own freewill for us to escape from sin and its inevitable consequence, death. He has provided Jesus Christ as the Mercy-seat where we can approach God and be forgiven, on the basis of our belief in God and love of Him, and our repudiation of our own sinful natures and taking upon ourselves the sin-covering Name and identity of Christ.

We die as individuals and are reborn as a part of Christ and share with him the fruits of his victory over sin.

As a token of the genuineness of our belief and love, He requires us to devote ourselves to the obedience of His all-wise commandments, which are simply His loving instructions regarding the course to follow for our own happiness and wellbeing.

We cannot earn life. It is entirely a free gift on the basis of love, but we must act in consistency with the love and belief we profess. We must show, by striving to obey Him in all things, that that love is the ruling power in our lives.

This is what God desires, and this gives Him great satisfaction and pleasure—

"There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth."

—are the words of Jesus. This is a glorious and inspiring truth. This is something we can give God—the pleasure and joy of obedient sonship. For this, all the creation was made.

If we are sincerely striving to know and do His will and promote His glory and pleasure, we have the great satisfaction of knowing that we are doing something for Him. We are making our lives worthwhile and useful in the most satisfying pursuit to which it is possible to devote ourselves.

In the words of Paul, we become "*laborers together with God*" in the great plan of the ages which is to fill the earth with His glory.

Do not feel that you can do nothing for God and therefore hesitate to keep asking Him to do things for you. But there are many things we can give God which are of great value to Him—thanksgiving and recognition of His loving provision, praise and glory, a humble heart sincerely seeking to do His will, **a love for Him that carefully avoids those things that grieve Him**, an appreciative reverence and devotion to His holy Word which He has caused to be written for our guidance to life.

The only way to find God, and through God to find peace, is by the study of His Word. It will not come by strivings with ourselves, no matter how agonized and sincere they are. We must get the facts, and get ourselves in line with them—

"It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps aright"

But God says—"*This is the way, walk ye in it.*"

It consists of specific facts and specific commands: "Do this—do not do that." It cannot come by wishful thinking, any more than we could learn to play the piano by merely wishing. Jesus says—

*"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and **learn** of me: for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls."*

The **closer we get to Jesus**, and actually **learn** of him—who he is, what he has done, what he will do in the future, and what we must do in order to be allowed to draw near him and share his love and friendship—the fuller and richer and more satisfying our life becomes.

It is all real, solid facts, like learning the laws of mathematics or the facts of history, although on an incomparably higher plane. Do not grope in the dark. Use the light that has been lovingly provided for your feet.

The Bible throws a light back 6000 years, and forward into eternity. It lifts us out of the murky restrictions of the immediate present and gives us a clear view of a glorious plan unfolding through the centuries. It gives our life a purpose and meaning and connection with eternity and divinity.

G.V.Growcott, The Berean Christadelphian, December, 1973