BE YE SEPARATE

Adults

The Missionary Baptist
Vacation Bible School Literature Committee presents

"Be Ye Separate"

Vacation Bible School Lessons for Adults
Written by Brother Clifford Hayes

Table of Contents

CHOOSE YOU THIS DAY 4
BE CHRIST-LIKE 9
KEEP THY HEART 15
ABSTAIN FROM EVIL 19
FINALLY SEPARATE 26

Chairman:
Elder Roger Carter

Chairman Elect:
Brother Cory Glass

Contributing Editors:
Elder Jeff Elliott
Elder Danny Holland
Elder Jerry Miller
Elder Stephen Skinner

Proofreaders:
Sister Megan Carter
Sister Jennifer Glass
Sister Leslie Hutchinson
Sister Pat Moore
Sister Ashley Murphy

Booklet Design and Layout:
Brother Cory Glass

Written and published by the
authority of Mount Lebanon
Missionary Baptist Church

In Cooperation with Fairview
Memorial Missionary Baptist Church,
Faith Missionary Baptist Church, and
Old Union Missionary Baptist Church

Price Per Booklet: $1.60

Treasurer
Brother Randall Henson
10022 Woodburn-Allen Springs Rd.
Alvaton, KY 42122
270-842-4526

©2007 Missionary Baptist Bible School Literature/
Mt. Lebanon Missionary Baptist Church

LESSON ONE

CHOOSE YOU THIS DAY

LESSON TEXT
JOSHUA 24:15

WRITTEN BY
BROTHER CLIFFORD HAYES

LESSON TEXT
JOSHUA 24:15
15 And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

INTRODUCTION TO THIS YEAR'S STUDY

From the time God made His covenant with Abraham to the present time, His design for His family was that they would be a people set apart from the world and its influences. Beginning at Genesis 12:1-3 God renewed His covenant with Abraham six times and in chapter 17:8 He makes this promise, "and I will be their God", relative to Abraham's descendants. After the children of Israel were formed into a nation at Sinai by the giving of the Law, Jehovah prohibited social dealings and intermarriage with the other idolatrous nations so as to keep their nation and worship of God pure.

We are under no less a commandment. For those who might think that God's instructions to Israel are outdated or unclear as to His reasons, the words of Paul, while writing under the inspiration of God and quoting from Isaiah, are easily understood and relevant to us today. II Corinthians 6:17 reads, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you." In the previous verses in this letter to the church at Corinth, the Apostle gives the admonishment not to be "unequally yoked together with unbelievers." Some interpret "unbeliever" as someone who is not of our faith or. There may be some validity in this view, but the main thrust of Paul's instructions are directed toward the Corinthian seeming reluctance to shed their pagan worship of idols, desiring to incorporate idol worship with devotion to God. His reference to righteousness, light and Christ, versus unrighteousness, darkness and Belial sets the tone for the contrast between pagan worship and the worship of Jehovah.

The reference to temples and idols in verse 16 strengthens this view and suggests that Paul is still combating this spiritual weakness of the Corinthians. The people wanted to be Christian while still partaking of all the activities that marked the worship of the Greek gods. They believed the spiritual Christian could exist inside while the outside physical body could still enjoy the wild pagan lifestyle of Corinth.

To this, Paul simply answers that the two cannot be mixed. God's people must be marked by a different kind of lifestyle than others, and that lifestyle cannot be mixed with a pagan lifestyle. The idols they were handling were the "unclean thing," and they were forbidden.

Such is most of the Christian world today. Many of us rejoice that our souls have been saved, made pure and white, washed in the blood of Jesus. In His sermon on the mount, Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Matthew 7:24) In spite of these words of our Lord, most of us find ourselves caught up in the things of the world to the extent that our devotion to and our worship of God is hindered. We don't have to do the things the vilest sinners do, but anything that gets between us and the duty we owe to God is sin and has become our false god, our idol.

The scripture says, "be ye separate."

INTRODUCTION TO LESSON ONE

Over the course of our lives we are required to make many decisions. Some of them are simple and straightforward, whereas others are more complex and may even alter the course of our lives forever. Decisions are made and the consequences are lived with. During our earliest years, someone else, usually parents, grandparents, or siblings, either make or help us make all of our decisions. Yet as we grow and mature, more and more decisions are left to us.

We make the decisions about whom we will date, marry, where we will live and what job we will take. Many times we make a decision concerning whether we will attend college. All of these are matters that will affect us all the rest of our lives. Many of our choices are made without any prior experiences to draw from. Many are made without thought of the future consequences. Many are made without prayer.

Prayer is vital in the life of a Christian. It is an encouragement to hear young people in our churches say they prayed that God would send them a godly spouse that they might have a Christian home. Too many times attractions are based on things that are anything but godly. We have all heard requests for prayers in finding a job and prayers for God's leadership in accepting a position of employment. These requests, these prayers are as they should be, but so often God is not considered.

JOSHUA

At the time of the scripture lesson, Joshua had spent many years devoted to service and prayers to God. The Bible first introduces him as Moses' commander when Amalek fought with Israel in Exodus 17. Joshua was one of the twelve men sent by Moses to explore the land, but only Joshua and Caleb gave an encouraging report. At the death of Moses, Joshua was chosen by God to lead His people and to be His agent before Israel. Following

this, Joshua led the conquest of Canaan that one of the promises given by God to Abraham would be fulfilled. This servant of God had many experiences of being tested by God and in turn testing the leadership of God. Due to his strong dedication to God, he was well qualified to issue the challenge to Israel as to whom they would serve.

It was near the end of Joshua's life when he made the statement contained in the scripture lesson. Was there a reason Joshua gave this admonition to the nation? Was there a reason that he felt it was important to warn the Israelites? Joshua knew these people. He knew firsthand how stubborn and rebellious the Israelites were. He knew how easily they could be led astray. He had witnessed firsthand the way the people had rebelled against their God- appointed leader. While Moses was on the mountain, he saw how quickly these rebellious people could fall into idolatry and how soon they began to murmur for other food after God had sent them manna and quail.

Joshua understood that the children of Israel were prone to reject God and His laws. This trait was evident to Joshua when they rejected his and Caleb's report and believed that of the other ten spies, failing to recognize the divine guidance of God and taking the land that had been promised them. After the stunning defeat of the army of Israel at the hands of the people of Ai, Joshua was on his face mourning for the fate of the nation. God spoke to him, telling him that the reason for their loss was sin. Achan had taken goods that God had commanded to be destroyed. There were other times that caused Joshua to recognize the weaknesses of the children of Israel.

Now, Joshua was old. He had served God and Israel all these years and knew that without a strong leader, the road to apostasy would be easier. This is the way it was all through the history of Israel. Strong leader: righteousness. Weak leader: apostasy. In Joshua 23 and 24, in his old age, he gathers the leadership of Israel together to give them a farewell address, and in this way communicates to them the things that are the most important for them to hear. It would have been easy for Joshua to focus on what he had done as a military leader, especially since his record was impressive. But Joshua begins his address by giving glory to God. He is far more interested in glorifying God than talking about himself.

CHOOSE YOU THIS DAY

He begins by reminding them of all that God had done for them and the deep obligation they have to Him for those acts of kindness, mercy and protection.
"And ye have seen all that the Lord your God has done to all these nations because of you; for the Lord your God is He who has fought for you." (Joshua 23:3) Then in Chapter 24, he reminded them that their fathers served other gods on the other side of the Euphrates River. It was from that idolatrous environment that God called Abraham, brought him to the country they now possessed and

made with him the Covenant. He recounts their journeys out of Egyptian bondage under the leadership of Moses and the establishment of them into a nation, under the covenant of the law made at Mount Sinai. He reminded them that He had conquered their enemies east and west of the Jordan River and gave them victories that subdued the land for their habitation.

Having stated all these historical facts of what the Lord had done for Israel, Joshua issues to them a challenge. "Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell: but as for me as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24: 14,15)

These words have the same message as those of Jesus when He said, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Luke 16:13) Mammon is idolatry. Mammon is living according to the rules of the world. Idolatry is anything that man holds in high regard, and lets that highly regarded thing or things interfere with his reasonable duty to God. This is not necessarily wealth, but can be golf, fishing, a job or whatever a person prizes and values above duty to God. Verses 14 and 15 of that same chapter continues, "And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him. And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men, but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God."

In the context of our lesson, "covetous" is interpreted as "money hungry". So to the other sins of the Pharisees is added the love of money. Hear the words of Paul: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affections, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience." (Colossians 3: 5-6) It is commonly thought among Christians that the breaking of the commandment, "Thou shall not covet..." is not as wicked as the sins of adultery, sexual relations outside of marriage, homosexual relations or the lusting after the flesh and carnal things. However, here Paul places covetousness in the same list as these heinous sins and promises the wrath of God upon those who are disobedient both to the law of God, and Gospel of Christ.

The main point in connection with these scriptures is that covetousness is idolatry, the Pharisees were covetous, and Jesus said that the inordinate love of money was an abomination in God's sight. The Bible is plain in its language: idolatry was a sin in Joshua's time, it was a sin in the time

of Jesus and it is a sin in our day. It is hatred by God and he will punish those who are guilty. The first commandment given at Mount Sinai was, "Thou shall have no other gods before me. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, or serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And showing mercy unto the thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments."

CHOICES IN THE BIBLE

The Bible is filled with such men and women who encountered the will of God and made choices that greatly affected their lives, and sometimes the lives of future generations: some to the betterment of mankind, some to its detriment. Adam willingly ate of the fruit in the garden, and God's greatest creative achievement came under the curse of sin. Noah was instructed to build a huge boat in the middle of the desert. The survival of the human race depended on his choice to obey those instructions. Jonah was told by God to go and preach. The redemption of Nineveh depended on his choice to obey. Of course, God had to resort to drastic measures to make Jonah comply. Isn't that the way it is sometimes with us?

.

Jesus called His first disciples with the invitation to leave their nets, come and follow Him, and He would make them fishers of men. The world rejoices at the results of their choices. God is forever issuing the call, extending the invitation, and offering the opportunity, and in that moment in time, all our future lives and perhaps the futures of others depend on our decision.

CHOICES TODAY

As wonderful as is God's plan of salvation, it is not something we can chose to accept with our carnal minds. We have no choice in becoming lost: that was settled for us in the garden. But when we come to the knowledge of sin, we have a choice to seek the Lord for the salvation of our souls. After a person is saved by God's grace, he is a changed person, but he can still choose whether to walk in God's wonderful light. Each decision will have a different outcome, some good, some bad. The consequences we must live with the rest of our lives. We have the God-given ability to chose, but remember, it is never His desire that we make the wrong choice.

Just as Joshua knew the weaknesses of Israel and Jesus knew the sinful hearts of those who were supposed to be religious, today God knows our frailties. All the stalwart men and women in the bible made decisions based on their knowledge of God, His mercy and His leadership. We have this same knowledge; we have the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Spirit to guide up. The choice is ours.

LESSON TWO

BE CHRIST-LIKE

LESSON TEXT
Romans 6:4

WRITTEN BY
BROTHER DANNY HAYES

LESSON TEXT
Romans 6:4
4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

INTRODUCTION

This entire lesson could be summed up in two words: follow Jesus. For all the actions during our Christian walk there will never be a better example than Jesus. Scripture tells us He was without sin and that He suffered the same temptations and tests as the rest of us. “For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15) There are some that say that Jesus had a choice, that He could have sinned, but chose not to. To say such a thing is blasphemy. It would mean that Jesus was human through and through. Jesus was God incarnate. He was God the Father, God the Son and He was God the Holy Spirit. We should not expect the Son to sin anymore that we would expect that of the Father. The point is that Jesus is sinless and as such is the example of how we should conduct our lives. However miserably we fail in trying to emulate everything that Jesus was, Jesus was and is the perfect example of whom we should imitate. He is our role model.

OUR ROLE MODEL

What or who is a role model? We hear this term, for example, used in connection with positive influences for inner- city children who grow up in single parent, or worse, no- parent families. “Role model” refers to a person who fills his or her role as a good or bad example for others. A positive role model demonstrates values, thoughts and actions, which are considered good in society. The hope is that those who observe role models will follow their example.

At one time or another everyone has role models. They might be relatives, church members, pastors or anyone who possesses desirable qualities, and whose influence makes us want to be better people. When we choose (another choice) our own role model, we first evaluate our own values, then find a person (often a famous person) that exhibits a majority of those points, and then emulate that person. We are all role models, whether for good or bad. Somewhere, someone is watching our lives and that someone just might be a child who is looking for a role person to be a pattern for his life. A number of years ago

there was a deacon at Old Union who sang in the choir and after the song service, the choir remained in their seats while the pastor was delivering the message. One Sunday morning the deacon had his leg crossed so that his left ankle was resting on his right knee. His left arm was resting on his left knee and in his left hand he was holding his glasses by the temples. Sitting beside him that day was a young boy who had his legs, arms and glasses positioned in exactly the same way. The young boy was attempting to emulate someone whom he admired. The lesson took because that young boy was my second son and the deacon was one of the best men I ever knew. Later in his life that young boy chose (that word again) another person to imitate who was a greater role model than the deacon could ever be.

I read that in Los Angeles there was a billboard looming high above the freeway. There were hundreds of thousands of people driving past its message every day. The message was an ESPN ad, seemingly harmless, with a picture of a couple of professional basketball players on it. It is the text that should disturb us: "Without Sports who would we follow?" In an age consumed with the life of glamour and the love of money, it should not be a surprise that this ad insinuates we actually need sports stars or celebrities in order to have role models. Who would we follow? As stated previously, the answer is obvious. How about parents, a favorite aunt or uncle, a teacher, or pastor? Or better than all of these, how about Jesus? As we pick and choose our role models, it is essential to look at the heart of the person. Hebrews 12:1 talks about a great cloud of witnesses. "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

All around us are people who love the Lord and serve Him in their daily lives. How wonderful is God's plan that you and I were not sent into this sinful world alone! The Lord gave us brothers and sisters in Christ who will run this race with us and help us through "the sin which doth so easily beset us." The important thing to remember, however, is that it is Jesus upon whom we fix our eyes. We may have role models in this world who are other Christians, running the same race as ours and serving the same God. But Jesus is our example, our ultimate role model.

OUR GOAL

For the Christian, heaven is not a goal; it is a destination. The destination of our eternal soul is fixed. Our goal is that "Christ be formed in you," to use the words of the apostle Paul in Galatians 4:19. To the Romans, he declares, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." (Romans 8:29) And to the Corinthians,

he says, “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (II Corinthians 3:18) Thus the goal of the Christian life could be summarized as our being formed, conformed, and changed into the image of Jesus Christ.

Becoming conformed to the image and character of Christ is God’s desire for all who come to know Him. Ephesians 4:14-16 tells us that we become like Christ by growing in our knowledge of Him: “Then we hence-forth will no more be children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may we grow up into him in all things which is the head, even Christ: For whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” This growing in our knowledge of Him is restated in 2 Peter 3:18: “But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.”

Many of us today lack a formula for-growth. We need to learn how we “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” In particular, we need to learn how we can effectively exercise the methods that God has ordained for the transformation of the human personality. Our participation in these God-ordained methods will enable us to increasingly take into ourselves Christ’s character and manner of life. What are these methods of growing to be Christ- like? And how can the newly saved child of God or even someone who has been saved many years but has never experienced spiritual growth, join themselves with God’s methods so they are changed into Christlikeness?

All of us have seen those who have been saved many years but still, as Paul said, “have need of milk, and not of strong meat.” (Hebrews 5:12) I recall a song by a contemporary Christian singer, and the words speak of such a man:

I know a man, maybe you know him too.
You never can tell he might even be you.
He knelt at the altar and that was the end.
He’s saved and that’s all that matters to him.

His spiritual tummy it can’t take too much.
One day a week he gets his spiritual lunch.
On Sunday he puts on his spiritual best
And gives his language a spiritual rest.

He’s been baptized, sanctified,
redeemed by the blood
But his daily devotions are stuck in the mud

He’s just a fat little baby
He wants his bottle and he don’t mean maybe
He’s sampled solid food once or twice
But he says doctrine leaves him cold as ice...”

Many of us can probably look back and see a time in our lives when we were like that. This song describes many Christians today because in reality, they have remained “baby believers” most of their spiritual lives. Circumstances are tragic when, due to some accident or birth defect, an

individual's body grows to adulthood while their mind remains in the infant stage. But it is even more tragic when this happens to someone spiritually—when someone never grows beyond spiritual infancy. The lost need to see Jesus living in and through all of God's children. They need us to be their example. In short, they need for more of us to realize our goal and to fulfill God's desire that we would be formed, conformed and changed into the likeness of His Son Jesus.

GOD ORDAINED METHODS OF GROWING INTO BEING CHRIST- LIKE

Prayer, study of God's word, meditation, confession to God of our sins and being active in church work are disciplines which we all should use to attempt to be more like Jesus. They are wonderful and no one could progress to spiritual meat without them. We simply must understand that we will never grow in Christ-like habits and Christ- like dispositions without intense, God- directed actions on our part. Now it must be said emphatically that these acts do not make us acceptable to God. Our acceptance is by grace through faith alone. However, these disciplines are methods through which we present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice. (Romans 12:1)

But God also works through the ordinary experiences of daily life to form the character of Christ in us. Through these experiences we come to know that Jesus is with us always, that he never leaves us nor forsakes us, and that we can cast all our care upon him.

One experience that enters into the formation of our Christ-like personality is found in the various trials, tribulations, and persecutions we must go through. The apostle James reminds us, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." (James 1:2-3) This "patience" is what the old timers called "fortitude," and they viewed it as one of the foundational virtues essential to a good life. James adds, "But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." (1:4) In II Peter 1:6, in his list of things necessary to grow in grace, this Apostle names godliness following patience.

Most often, the trials we face are minor in nature. Your son puts a nice round hole in the neighbor's window with his new BB gun. You have a misunderstanding and falling out with someone who used to be your best friend. An in-law has a mean attitude or worse yet, a blood relative has a mean attitude. Even these trials that are seemingly trivial work patience in us, and we learn something of the patience of God.

At other times, these adversities are tragic. The company you worked for your entire life shuts down and you are left without a job. A loving family member becomes ill and dies. An accident claims the life of a loved one. These are the sorrows that all have observed and will no doubt occur in our lives. They are part of life. Even more important, they are part of our growing in Christ, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer

persecution." (2 Tim. 3:12) Through trials, tribulations and persecutions we come to see God's timing and God's will as altogether good. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28) It is important to know that we are shaped and formed ever more fully into the way of Christ through the process of these experiences. We draw on Him for strength and comfort. We become more stable men and women in our attitude and service to Him.

Still another form of the experimental methods of becoming Christ like is through our interaction with the movings of the Holy Spirit upon our hearts. We have all felt the drawing and encouraging of the Spirit. We did not hear an audible voice, but we sensed the wonder that comes with divine communication. Often the Spirit comes to us as a still small voice as it did to Elijah when he was fleeing from Jezebel (1 Kings 19:12.)

Often the Spirit comes to us as teacher, helping us to unravel and understand difficult scriptures. At other times, the Spirit comes as counselor and guide. Perhaps we are given words to share, and many times with great confidence in the Spirit within us, we speak out in the worship service. We must never testify without being led of the Spirit. We must learn to never speak beyond our being led. We must learn to distinguish between the life-giving words of the Spirit and the death-giving words of the flesh. Otherwise we will see that our self-initiated words vanish into nothing, and what had been a Spirit-filled service is killed.

We may harden our hearts and turn away from the urgings of the Spirit. If we continue to squelch the Spirit our spiritual life will be hindered. But if we will listen, God's patience and love overcomes us, and we repent and turn back into the right paths. Throughout, God is molding, shaping, forming us into creatures that, just as Christ, can bear the cross we are required to carry.

In order to conform our lives to the point of being Christ-like we must conquer pride. Last year we studied a lesson on walking humbly. We learned that humility is diametrically opposed to pride. If we are to be Christ-like there is no room for pride in our lives. As we begin to see God as high and exalted, to read of cherubim and seraphim praising God and all the heavenly host casting their crowns before the throne, singing, "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they were and are created" (Revelation 4:11), we should be aware of just how unworthy we are, and realize that all we are, all we have, all we do is second-handed. In his great lesson on vanity (pride), Solomon said there was nothing new under the sun. We are not the initiator of our salvation, nor the master of our fate. Far from it. We are utterly dependent upon a loving Father who brings us the plan whereby we are saved and who brings us the materials to sustain our physical bodies. What do we have that might cause us to be prideful? Everything

that we enjoy comes from God.

CONCLUSION

Just over two thousand years ago, God became a man and came to earth in human form in the person of Jesus Christ. He taught about God's never ending love for every person and proved he was God through the miracles he performed. Jesus was and still is the source of peace and hope. I use Him here in this writing as our role model because all Christians should enjoy the feelings of security and stability He brings to our lives. It's sometimes difficult to apply what he taught, to walk as He would have us, and yet, these lessons have such amazing results in our lives. In His ministry Jesus was truthful, gentle, kind, sensitive, compassionate, loving and strong. He was perfect in every way. His message had real appeal and people would flock to hear Him speak and learn from Him. Jesus spoke of human equality in the sight of God. If Jesus taught no other doctrine, what inspiration this message must have been to the masses, who had never known anything about equality before God. Heretofore the masses had the High Priest do their communicating with God, and here He said they could do it themselves.

LESSON THREE

KEEP THY HEART

LESSON TEXT
PROVERBS 4:23

WRITTEN BY
BROTHER CLIFFORD HAYES

LESSON TEXT
PROVERBS 4:23
23 Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

INTRODUCTION

Proverbs is so full of wisdom and understanding. We would do well to study its teachings and let them become a guide to our lives. Many Christians do not heed the teachings from God's word, and that is when they get in trouble, many times ruining their lives and the lives of others.

Among the many things Solomon teaches is the warning in this lesson's scripture. In previous verses Solomon warned not to do evil, and here he teaches how to do that which pleases the Lord. It is not enough for us to shun the occasions of sin, but we must study the methods of doing the perfect will of God. The heart of man is his innermost being, his thoughts, desires, intents and motives. What a man thinks is what he will do. Keeping those thoughts in harmony with God's word and will is of utmost importance if we are to live the life that is pleasing and profitable to God and that will separate the intents of our hearts from the will and influences of Satan. In this one verse, God, through Solomon, gives a commandment, the manner of performing it, and the reasons for its being given.

KEEP THY HEART

The heart of man is his worst part before regeneration, and can be the best afterward. A man's heart is the seat of his principles, which in turn serves to determine the course of his actions. The greatest difficulty in regeneration is to win the heart to God; and the greatest difficulty after conversion is to keep the heart with God. The exhortation is to "keep thy heart" from sin "which doth so easily beset us." (Hebrews 12:1) The word "keep" means "to guard." It is a military term meaning to watch over, to protect a treasure; to keep safely from enemy invaders. We are to protect our hearts from corruption, destruction, distortion and decay, because the thoughts, desires, intents, motives and actions come from our hearts. Protecting our hearts leads to lives that are pleasing to God and to us as well.

In the verses after the scripture lesson, Solomon continued to warn that we keep our mouths and lips under control. We should keep our eyes fixed on that which is right, not looking for something that will lead us astray. We should keep our paths straight, not deviating to the right or left but moving with singleness of purpose to that which is righteous and good.

Men and women are so often enticed by the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16) and all too often succumb to temptation. That gospel writer goes on and says that those things are of the world and not of the Father. God has given man His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life. He has given Him his written word to instruct and guide him through this life. He has given his Holy Spirit to indwell in him and empower him to overcome this world and its fleshly desires. In the giving of all these things, He has equipped him to be successful in living the life that would please Him and to be beneficial in the coming kingdom.

We understand that we must constantly employ all these available holy means to keep the heart from sin and maintain its sweet and free communion with God. I wrote "constantly" because the text adds, "with all diligence," which extends the duty attached to this exhortation to all the circumstances of a Christian's life, making this duty forever binding. If the heart must be kept because "out of it are the issues of life," then as long as these issues of life are flowing, we are obliged to keep it.

WITH ALL DILIGENCE

My Grandfather would have defined diligence as "keep on keeping on." Mr. Webster has a more learned definition, but when broken down it means the same thing: "constant and persistent attention to one's work."

The keeping and correct management of the heart in every circumstance is one of the great duties of a Christian's life. There is a proverb of man that states that a person cannot get anything out of life except what he puts into it. This adage can properly be applied to hearts. A portion of Hebrews 12:1 has been quoted, but it would be well to hear the rest of Paul's words that regarding this subject. "let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." All right-thinking Christians know that whatever their eyes look at, whatever their ears hear, and whatever their mind contemplates, whatever they give their time to, will be deposited in their hearts and will not only determine the quality of life they lead, but the quality of service they give to God and the church. These influences will determine their actions. We should guard our hearts with caution and thoughtfulness, because out of this seat of our emotions will flow the consequences and circumstances of our lives, or as the scripture says, "for out of it are the issues of life."

This diligence does not end with our own lives, but extends to those around us. Hear the words of God, spoken through His servant Moses, "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons." (Deuteronomy 4:9) Then the duty that was ours also becomes theirs and then, "My son, keep thy father's command-

ment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life." (Proverbs 6: 20-23)

THE ISSUES OF LIFE

Everything we do, whether good or evil, that affects our lives, the lives of those about us, the world in which we live, and our effect on the worship of God and the welfare of His church, depends on the actions that come from the desires of the heart. We are reminded of the often- quoted verse in Matthew 15:19, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:" Contrast these words of Jesus with those in Matthew 12: 35, "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things". Then Jesus tells those to whom he is speaking, "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement. For by thy words thou shall be justified, and by thy words thy shall be condemned.." So we see that evil thoughts and also righteous thoughts are issued from the heart. It is imperative that the child of God separate himself from the world and resist its temptations, because Satan aims for the heart of man. If the heart is faulty, the entire man is faulty, because from the heart comes the issues of life. A great damage is done to the cause of God when the heart of man is divided, when he attempts to live both in the world and in God's kingdom.

DIVIDED HEARTS

"Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty: he shall break down their altars, he shall spoil their images." (Hosea 10: 2) Hosea's message was to the nation of Israel, but it is true for the church today and also to the individual children of God. To have a divided heart is a most serious disease, a sin sickness and it affects the most vital part of man. We have seen that it pleases God for man to have only righteous thoughts coming forth from that innermost part of His creation. Jesus taught that man cannot serve two masters, that he would end up loving one and hating the other. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Luke 16: 13) To have our hearts divided to the point that we try to serve the world and its pleasures and at the same time serve God and His riches is an intensely abominable condition in the sight of our Lord. The person who is in this condition has much difficulty in coming to repentance. He is lukewarm, and Jesus addressed this condition in the letter to the church at Laodicea. This disease of the heart is chronic. There is no acuteness in this condition that would cause pain and force contrition and remorse. It begins with the child of God seeing what the world has to offer and thinking that he can dabble just a bit and it won't affect him because he has God in his heart. From this gradual beginning, the darkness of Satan moves into the heart and the

light of God is shoved out, leaving the man merely a shell of what God has created, without power to do God's will and without influence to move a sinner to seek the Lord.

Such a Christian is inconsistent in his conduct. The semblance of his life is quite different when he leaves the house of God after worship service and again enters into the world that has caused him to have divided loyalties. This is a symptom of a potentially fatal disease- not fatal to the destroying of his soul, but fatal to his desire to serve his maker and to the influence he might have with those who are lost. The issues of his heart have been changed. This man is unhappy. The righteousness of his soul cries out for the body, which houses it, to return to the spiritual being it once was. This writer believes that Lot was just such a man. When dissension arose between the herdsmen of Abraham and Lot, they separated, Lot choosing (that word again) the plain of Jordan, pitching his tent near Sodom. "And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as thou comest unto Zoar. Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east, and they separated themselves the one from the other. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom. But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." (Genesis 13: 10-13) Lot was still a saved man as evidenced in II Peter 2: 8, but he chose to live in that wicked place because the standard of living and the potential for riches were greater there than where Abraham dwelled.

How much greater his prestige would have been among the tribes inhabiting the land. How much greater his influence on future generations, had he chosen to separate himself from the world and live among the people of God.

The child of God must work hard in order to carry out the urgings of the Holy Spirit. The heart must be fed with the things of God in order to do His good and perfect will. Several years ago, one of my sons related a story he heard on a Christian radio station. It seems an American Indian was being interviewed concerning his life as a Christian. He said that inside of himself there were two big dogs, one evil and one good, and they were constantly fighting for supremacy in his life. When asked which dog had the upper hand, he replied, "The one I feed the most."

Be ye separate.

LESSON FOUR

ABSTAIN FROM EVIL

LESSON TEXT
1 THESSALONIANS 5:22

WRITTEN BY
BROTHER CLIFFORD HAYES

LESSON TEXT
1 THESSALONIANS 5:22
22 Abstain from all appearance of evil.

INTRODUCTION

God chose many different ways to communicate with man. To one it was from a burning bush, to others it was through a hand writing on a wall, to another it was out of a blinding light. Hebrews 1: 1-2 gives another method: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds:". One method by which He speaks to us today is through the urgings of the Holy Spirit. He also employs language—the written word—to communicate His will to His people. Even though this medium of conveying information is adequate to achieve His objectives, misunderstanding sometimes can occur, not through an error of God, but through mistakes in interpreting His words. One example of seeming confusion is seen in Paul's admonition to the church at Thessalonica:" "Abstain from all appearance of evil," This verse frequently is used to assert that Christians should avoid engaging in actions that appear to be improper or sinful, whether they are actually sinful or not. Others attempt to convey the idea that one should abstain from evil in whatever form it may appear. In keeping with the overall theme of these lessons, "Be Ye Separate," we will look at both views and try to determine if either or both are correct.

THAT WHICH APPEARS TO BE EVIL

What does "appearance" mean? Mr. Webster defines "appearance" as (1.) the act of appearing; (2.) outward look, aspect; (3.) pretense. The words in the scripture lesson have been used to admonish people against many things, from movie theaters, to secular music, to drinking from a bottle, no matter what's in it. I read about a church member (not of our faith) that would not allow a ketchup bottle on the table, either at home or in a restaurant, because it looked evil. After all, alcohol comes in bottles. So, they'd quickly pour the ketchup onto their plates and then instruct the waitress to remove the bottle immediately. Such is an extreme of misinterpretation of the scriptures. There are others. It seems that if a person does not like another's appearance or actions this verse could be used out of its intended context and applied to attempt to prove that changes must be made. Certain styles of clothes, hair, beards, and mustaches would all be

problematic, because at some time in our history, they “appeared” evil to some people.

As extreme as the foregoing appears, there is another side to this subject. There have been times when I attended meetings of my profession. Alcoholic beverages were served but I, being a teetotaler, drank Coke. Even though everyone in the room knew that I did not use alcohol, what if someone passing by the door saw me standing in front of the bar with a glass in my hand, talking with another man holding a similar glass. That person would not know that my glass contained Coke. Was this an “appearance of evil” from which I should have abstained? That question bothered me then and it concerns me even yet, even though I have been retired from practice for several years and have not attended a meeting during that time.

Christians are sometimes accused of being hypocrites because their conduct is perceived as being no different from that of the lost. We all know that there are those among us that have gross sins in their lives. Even though Satan cannot possess their souls, he has their influence. They are not effective in God’s work and in reaching those who are in need of His saving grace. The ability to sway sinners and affect lives for God is gone when confidence is lost in a Christian. Even though this scenario is too often true, it is not always the case. Admittedly, there are other sins in my life of which I am guilty, but the upbringing of my parents and the teachings of my church instilled in me the belief that, for me, drinking alcohol was sinful. So in my mind the question for me was, “Could my drinking a Coke on those occasions, or could my actions at other times that might be perceived as wrong by the observer, be a stumbling block to a weak brother or sister or someone who was without God?”

All men are free to do that which is within the laws of the state. However, the laws of man are often at variance with the laws of God. What is approved by society may be an abomination in the eyes of the Almighty. Paul, writing of eating meat offered to idols, addresses this issue in 1Corinthians 8:9: “But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak.” So, there is a legitimate command to abstain from activities that appear evil to our weaker brothers and sisters in the Lord and also to those who are unsaved. In his discussion, prior to and after this commandment, Paul states that those who have knowledge of God know that an idol is nothing but a representation of a pagan god and there is nothing sacred or forbidden about meat that is offered to that pagan god. But in his warnings about being a stumbling block to those who are weak he writes, ”Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.” (1 Corinthians 8:13)

To those who attempt to give more meaning than is intended to our scripture lesson, Jesus must be an enigma. We know for certain that Jesus abstained from sin. However,

have you considered some things that Jesus did? I'm not trying to be disrespectful, but it does not seem that Jesus always abstained from the "appearance" of evil. He and his disciples picked grain on the Sabbath, and they did not ceremoniously wash their hands before eating. Both of those "appeared" evil to the ruling Jewish hierarchy. Furthermore, Jesus ate with the tax collectors, prostitutes, and other sinners. He also drank wine. In fact, this appeared so evil to some of his time that they charged him with being a drunkard in Matthew 11:19, "The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." Jesus also turned water into wine at the marriage in Canan.

So, where does the "appearance of evil" fit?

THAT WHICH IS SINFUL

I believe the Bible has one primary message—turn away from sin and turn toward God. God's word teaches this. Having said that, I also believe that many verses in the Bible have both a principal and a subordinate meaning. In this verse, I feel that we have discussed the secondary meaning first. So, what did the apostle Paul actually mean when he said, "Abstain from all appearance of evil"? A.T. Robertson in his work Word Pictures in the New Testament translates the verse, "Abstain from every form of evil." If we take his translation, there is no doubt to Paul's main purpose for the scripture. In our churches we expect our pastors to preach from the King James Version of the Bible, but most of our leading preachers use other translations and reference books to better understand difficult passages. Not that this verse is particularly difficult, but in surveying five translations other than the King James Version, it was found that three read "form of evil" and two read "kind of evil." It is obvious to this writer that the 1611 translators of the King James Version were attempting to convey the idea that one should abstain from evil in whatever form it may occur, whether it be actual sin or merely that which appears to be sin. However, this verse is primarily a commandment against the practice of sin in whatever form it occurs—whether lying, stealing, murdering or anything that is in opposition to God's will.

COMFORTABLE WITH SIN

Too often forms of evil are present in our lives, or if not in our actual lives then in our immediate surroundings. And sadly enough--we get comfortable with it; we get used to it. Has anyone ever gone into a semi-dark room and felt that a flashlight was needed to be able to see? We might stumble about for a bit and reach for something to hold to. But gradually our eyes accommodate the darkness and we are able to make out objects more clearly. We can walk about more easily and avoid the obstacles in the room. Isn't it funny how we get used to the dark? Such is the way we get used to sin. Getting used to moral evil in one's life is not a "funny" matter to God, nor should it be to the Christian.

Even if he doesn't indulge, too often the average Christian will learn to side-step sin and not even notice it. In teaching, I have used the following example. Get the largest paper towel box and place it in the doorway of a main traffic area in your home. The first few times you attempt to go through the door, the box will be in your way, but gradually you will unconsciously accommodate your movements through the door and soon you will not notice the box is there. The box is still there in the doorway just as sin is there in our surroundings, but we no longer notice either of them.

In no way is it pleasing to God that we should become comfortable with the sin that is about us. In contrast to the Corinthians' desire to cling to their pagan idols and Lot's tolerating the sinful excesses of Sodom, we are instructed to "come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you." The apostle Peter writes, "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation." (1 Peter 2: 11,12)

GOD HATES SIN

It is obvious from reading the Bible that God had an abhorrence to sin. It was that which caused Him to cast His greatest creation's from the garden He had prepared for their use. It was that which caused Him to destroy the world by water when the actions of man became repugnant to Him. It will be that which will cause Him to destroy the sinful portion of His creation by fire when man becomes so abased that God cannot look upon him any longer. Scripture is explicit on the disgust that God has for sin and those who indulge in it. Proverbs 6: 16-19 is very clear on the feelings of God in this matter: "These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren."

The seven evil attributes listed in this passage are:

1. Pride
This is an attitude of self-exaltation that so contemptuously tramples on others to the point that there is a rebellion against God. Pride was the sin of Satan. Pride deceives the heart and it is the basis of all other sin, and for this reason God intensely hates it.

2. Lying
This is the communication of a false statement--information deliberately given as being true. It is also anything meant to deceive, which is also known as deception. Satan was the author and father of the lie and lied to Eve immediately after God's creation of man (Genesis 3:1-7). Not only did man prefer the lie of Satan just after his creation, but he continu-

ously chooses it over a willingness to believe the veracity of God (Romans 1:25). False prophets become Satan's agents by lying and deceiving people with lies against God's truth. Unsaved men, like their spiritual father, the devil, speak lies from their birth, and the fate of all liars, of every kind, along with other incorrigible sinners, will be in the lake of fire.

3. Murder

This is the premeditated and purposeful killing of an innocent person. It is distinguished from the unintentional slaying of a person. The penalty for the one who murders was set initially by God, and it is execution. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man." (Genesis 9:6) God has extended to human government the right to exact the death penalty. The killing of an enemy in war does not constitute murder. The sixth commandment doesn't prohibit warfare. Nations have the right to defend themselves against aggressors. Likewise, there is no guilt in killing an intruder, a person has the right to defend his home and family. Satan is the original murderer (John 8:44) and man's kinship with him makes every person who possesses a spirit of hatred an actual or a potential murderer (1 John 3:15, Matthew 5:21). Such murderers have no place in God's kingdom either now or hereafter.

4. Wicked imaginations

This is an active and lethal form of evil. It first takes control of the mind, a description by Christ of the hearts of the Pharisees: "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things." (Matthew 12:34, 35) So, according to the words of Jesus, evil imaginations are manifested in and by evil actions, which is in contrast to the actions of righteous persons, and certainty of punishment awaits the wicked.

5. Feet running to mischief

Wicked imaginations logically lead to this sin. God absolutely hates the plots or planned inventions of someone's heart, and He also hates the way evil men are intent to swiftly run to do wickedness. So the heart, if not ruled by Jesus, can lead you astray. Today, we as Christians do not need to look very far to see all kinds of wickedness. Everywhere you go there is some kind of filth, or impurity all about us. It takes a lot of strength from the Lord to resist. Therefore, we must keep in mind the admonition of God through the apostle Paul in Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

6. False witness

Whereas lying, as described above, is general in nature, this refers to the specific altering of truth as it relates to ourselves or to another person. Today many people do this. Have you ever had someone say to you, "tell

them I am not here"? Or "the check is in the mail," when it's not? Sometimes being a false witness is more damaging to individuals than the petty incidences just described. A person's reputation can be affected or his life could be at stake. What is most damaging is a false witness as it relates to God and His work. The misrepresentation of God's truth revealed in His Word would qualify one as a "false witness." Such representation leads others away from God and is therefore subject to grave judgment. False witnesses may be found in religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and sects such as Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, and Scientology, that deny the deity of Jesus Christ, His substitutionary and effective work on the cross, and His resurrection.

7. Sowing discord

This is the purposeful instigation and spreading of division, strife and confusion among "brethren." This is the specific and planned activity of an evil person designed to keep mankind apart from God. It can also be applied to Christians whose activities within the church accomplishes the same goal. Often a member of the church works to have his will accomplished rather than that of the Lord. John describes such a person in 3 John: 9,10: "I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church." Such actions are condemned in scriptures, there being only one head over the church, and that being our Lord, Christ Jesus. Those that sow discord, if not stopped, will be used by the enemy as agents to introduce this sin into the church

In Psalm 139: 21,22, we read of the attitude a Christian should have toward those who sin against God and refuse to follow His commandments, "Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies."

CONCLUSION

Christ called His followers to a radical life, which contradicted the conduct expected by the religious leaders of that day. One of these expectations was to refrain from associating with certain types of people, judged by the Pharisees to be undesirable, on the basis of their appearance and station in life. Although Christ refuted this practice with His lifestyle, many today might condemn his behavior, under their interpretation, of "avoiding the appearance of evil."

Christ avoided evil of every kind, yet He did not always avoid the "appearance of evil." He wanted to please his father and that should be our desire. Christ lived with the pressure of religious bigotry and in the presence of sin. He calls upon us to do the same. John 15: 19 proves this: "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."

While we are strictly commanded to separate our lives from the sins and the lusts of the world, if we follow the example of Jesus we must associate with those who are lost if we have any hope of winning their souls to God. All of us are in contact every day with those who are in need of salvation. We need to be perfect witnesses as to the goodness of God's mercy. Some would measure the maturity of a Christian as one who has most successfully separated himself from the secular world where they live. But if we are to follow Christ's example, the mark of true maturity is not withdrawal from that world but in penetration, carrying the word of truth.

LESSON FIVE

FINALLY SEPARATE

LESSON TEXT
MATTHEW 25:31-34

WRITTEN BY
BROTHER CLIFFORD HAYES

LESSON TEXT

Matthew 25:31-34

31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

INTRODUCTION

Elder Jeff Elliott writes:

"In the end [the end of time] the Bible teaches that there will be a final separation of those that are saved and those that are lost in their sins. Those that are saved are looking for this day to come when all evil will finally be destroyed, and we are ushered into eternity. There is a song that comes to mind when I think of this. It says, 'What a day that will be when my Jesus I shall see, and I look upon his face the one who saved me by his grace, When he takes me by the hand and leads me through the promised land, What a day glorious day that will be.'

The Bible is very clear on who will go where. The saved will go to glory with God, and the lost will go to eternal damnation. We must as God's stewards spread the gospel across the world so that others will have the opportunity to be saved by his wonderful grace. So then we must do all that we can to choose right, be Christ-like, keep our hearts and abstain from all evil, so that others will see Jesus in our lives. By doing these things we are doing what the Bible tells us to do."

By attending to those things outlined in the previous four lessons we will separate our bodies from the world of sin and immorality, awaiting the day when we shall be finally separate.

WHEN COMES THE END?

For many years there have been people who wished to emulate the prophets of the Old Testament and predict the times and places that certain events would occur. Several years ago there was a woman named Jeanne Dixon that attracted a good bit of attention in that some of her guesses came to pass. At the time someone called her so called gift "shotgun prophecy." Send out enough pellets (predictions) and some of them are bound to hit. These prognosticators

are varied in their subjects. For many centuries, people have been predicting the year, month and sometimes day when a violent and sudden catastrophe would terminate all life on earth, the war of Armageddon would take place in the Middle East, God would pour out horrendous wrath on most of humanity, and Christ would return to earth in His second coming.

In some instances the "prophets" have predicted that these events would happen in their own immediate future. All of these predictions share one common factor-- none have ever come true. There is a good reason for that. Jesus, speaking of the end of the world, said in Matthew 24:36, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my father only." While doing some research for this lesson, I ran across a news item in the Washington Post dated March 12, 1994. It read in part, "Connie Roberson and her husband, Jimmy, don't save for retirement or their children's college education. Victor Jackson, a senior at Cleveland State University, doesn't worry about the job market. Jackson and the Robersons believe that by 1996 the world is going to end in an instant. They were among about 1,000 people who attended the Institute of Divine Metaphysical Research's conference last week." The article went on to add, "The number of end of the world predictions reported throughout all of recorded human history that have (so far) come true: 0. And counting. They keep makin' 'em, and we'll keep reportin' 'em."

Scientists make calculated predictions, but they are only that. On August 30, 2006, ABC television network aired a two-hour special giving different scientists' views on how the end of the world will occur. There were seven scenarios suggested, ranging from the earth being sucked into a black hole to climatic changes mainly brought about by global warming. I missed the first fifteen minutes due to Wednesday night service, but of the part I saw, God and His judgements were not even alluded to. Several years ago geologists predicted a catastrophic earthquake in the southeastern area of Missouri that would have affected the region in which we live. It never happened then and it hasn't to this day. Mere man cannot foretell when God will unleash His awesome power.

As the above news article points out, no man knows when it will occur; not those most logical in their insight, not the most learned Bible scholar. All these people have to do is read the words of Jesus. We all know that there shall be such a day: however, no one knows when it shall be, not even the angels are told when it will come to pass. These messengers of God, who will accompany the Lord back at His second appearing, have no knowledge of the time of the end. None knows " but my Father only." This is one of those secret things which belong to the Lord our God. The uncertainty of the time of Christ's coming is, to those who are watchful, a matter of high regard toward those secret things and makes them more watchful; but to those who are unsaved, it is a taste of death, if they remain careless in the way they handle

the gospel presented to them.

THE SEPARATION OF ALL PEOPLE

The text for this lesson is set on the day of judgement, following the second coming of Christ. All nations will be gathered before Him. The criteria to be applied at that day of judgement will be the same for all people, that being whether or not the individual has had the blood of Jesus applied to their sinful soul. There are no exceptions. Romans 2:11 tells us, "For there is no respect of persons with God." As a matter of fact, this criteria has already been exercised before the death of the individual and before Jesus returns. The passage also speaks of a separation of people. The good from the bad; the sheep from the goats: some to go on the right hand, some on the left; some to joy everlasting, some to eternal fire and suffering.

According to the writings of Paul, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all (Romans 2:16). This is one of the great doctrines of the Bible. It teaches us that God, who sent us a Savior at Bethlehem, will one day banish evil from His creation. In patience and mercy He delays this moment of judgment; but it must eventually come. Peter writes that in the last days there will come scoffers who have no regard for God, saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." (II Peter 3:4) Paul, preaching on Mars Hill in Athens and speaking to the Athenians concerning their worshiping idols said, "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent." (Acts 17:30) In Jeremiah 16: 18 we see an example of God's judgement: "And first I will recompense their iniquity and their sin double; because they have defiled my land, they have filled mine inheritance with the carcases of their detestable and abominable things. " A God who simply tolerated the injustice and evil which is present in the world would either be without power or immoral; not able, or not willing, to deal with it. Such a God would not be the God of the scriptures, indeed, hardly a "god" at all. The consistent teaching of the Bible which leads to our Christian beliefs is that God will judge between good and evil, and will finally root out the corrupting and demoralizing forces which have been at work in His world. We learn in the book of Revelation that this will take place at a great, final court, the moment of universal judgment. The secrets of all hearts will be revealed. Faith, endurance and hope will be rewarded. Evil will be accused and exposed.

THE GREAT WHITE THRONE

The Bible teaches that when God has grown weary with the sins and excesses of man, He will bring this world to an end. Then the event Jesus spoke of in the scripture lesson will take place. This is recorded in Revelation 20: 11-15 and is known as the great white throne judgement. The separation of the sheep and the goats will take place and the pronouncement will be given to the sheep, "Come,

ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." But wait! There may be a difficulty. It may be said (and it has been), "If the law of God is the rule of judgment, and if all sins are brought into judgment, then certainly every human being must be condemned; 'for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God..' (Roman 3:23) According to this view, none can be saved." To remove this difficulty, let it be remembered that besides the books of works, there is another book which will be produced there, written from the foundation of the world. This is called the book of life. This contains the names -- and they shall never be blotted out -- of all those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. The Lamb has made the sacrifice to present these to God without spot or blemish, or any such thing as sin that would besmirch their souls. They will appear on that day clothed with the righteousness of the redeemer. Jesus, our Lord, is their covenanted surety. He answers to every accusation made against them.

When all things are made ready and the whole mass of humanity is gathered before the righteous judge, a separation will be made of that great congregation into two parts: the righteous, and the wicked. The former will be placed on the right hand of the judge, and even though their souls are sealed, He will commence to read from the books. But as soon as their many sins are brought to view, it will be made apparent that they are pardoned through the blood of Christ. When the books are opened, a long account will appear against them; but upon checking the names in the book of life, it will be seen that all sins are freely forgiven through the riches of the grace found in Christ Jesus. Then, salvation is come, fulfilling the earnest of their inheritance (Ephesians 1: 14). But an exacting account has been made of all their good works; and these will be mentioned to their honor, and rewarded as though no sins or imperfection had been a part of them.

It will not be so with the wicked. By this time they will be certain of their doom. The time is past when they will say " to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb."(Revelation 6: 16) In all his existence there will probably be no moment in which the sinner's anguish will be so eternally condemning as in this one, when the Judge shall say, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25: 41) because "whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20: 15) What a horrible pronouncement to hear from the Son of God, and it will be made even more dreadful in that many will think that they are the children of God. The deceivers, the liars, the spreaders of Satan's gospel will also have their reward when Jesus will say, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (Matthew 7: 23)

Then will the question be eternally answered that the unbelieving world

asks about a loving, benevolent God: "Could God, who loves the world, sentence someone to a place as terrible as hell is supposed to be?" Yes, God is extremely loving toward those who are in His will, but is also extremely wrathful toward those who are His enemies. Those of God's crowning creation --created to bring honor and glory to God-- who have not availed themselves of the shed blood of our Savior, will never enter heaven. We believe that there will be no sin in heaven. The Bible teaches that the cause of death, sorrow, tears, heartaches, troubles, in short, all the miseries known to man, has been caused by the sin of Adam. However, the Bible also teaches that in heaven all those things are in the past. One of the great blessings awaiting the redeemed is found in Revelation 21: 3-4: "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Then, and only then, when the children of God are dwelling in the tabernacle not made with hands and the enemies of God have been cast into the lake of fire that burns and burns eternally and eternally and eternally, will the redeemed be finally separate from the sin about them and the influences of Satan.

FINALLY SEPARATE

God will be present with his people in heaven. Here they have His Holy Spirit, but there He will dwell with them continually. All remembrances of former troubles will vanish. In their earthly lives God's people have often been in tears by reason of sin, of affliction, of the calamities of life; but in heaven no memory of former sorrows shall remain. Christ makes all things new. If in this life man is willing and desirous that his gracious Lord and Savior should make all things new in his soul, He will also make all things new in his heavenly abode, and at that time man will enjoy complete happiness. In this life, sinful pleasures are as bitter as poisoned waters, but the joys which Christ imparts are as living waters springing from a fountain, pure and refreshing, abundant and eternal.

It is difficult for us to envision the joys of Heaven because all the joys we experience in this life are short-lived. They are tempered by the realization that sorrow usually follows our joy. In Heaven this will not be so. Our joy will be complete and eternal. It will never be lessened by any sorrow, for sorrows will be no more. The scripture quoted above from Revelation 21: 4 proves this. When those tears have been wiped away by the hand of God, we shall gaze into His face and see what eyes have never seen or imagined. The splendor and joy of that moment is so beautiful that only the immortal soul, separated from the body in death, could gaze upon it and live. "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have en-

tered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (1 Corinthians 2: 9)

After looking upon the face of God, the first thing we notice about Heaven is the love that reigns there. We will love everyone, and everyone will love us with a completely unselfish love. We will love in the same way God loves. In writing of love in 1 Corinthians 13: 10 Paul states, "But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away," showing that when Jesus returns and claims us for His own, He will bring the perfect love of God with Him and impart it to us.

Then we shall be separated—finally separated--from uncontrolled emotions of this world that causes turmoil in our lives and vexation of our spirit.

Price Per Booklet: $1.60