

A GROWING RELATIONSHIP
A CHALLENGE TO BELIEVERS
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INTRODUCTION

Dear Reader,

If you are a born-again Christian; if you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior, and have put your trust in His redeeming blood as a means of forgiveness for your sins, then there has been a dramatic change in your relationship to God. A change for the better occurred, when you, as an enemy of God, were reconciled to Him and became His child -- (See Romans 5:10 and 8:16). You are now part of His family! You have a brand new relationship to and with God! And God wants this relationship to grow.

It seems, however, that many things get in the way and hinder that growth. Many Christians have a problem perceiving what the relationship is actually to consist of. They feel as if they have been endowed with an endless list of regulations: "If you are going to be a good Christian, you need to do this ... We should never be guilty of doing those things ... We don't go to places like that And the list goes on. Young people especially, are discouraged with lists of do's and don'ts. Because of their age group, they become targets of many restrictions. In trying to teach discipline and responsibility, it is often difficult to persuade them that this is not all their relationship to God consists of. But whether you are 15 or 50, or somewhere in between, it would be very disheartening to think that God rated us, or accepted us on sheer performance.

The do's and don'ts are edicts of individuals - - preachers, teachers, parents, and even denominations -- who with all good intentions have focused on Christian conduct rather than Christian character. The first is outward; the second is an inward work. Christians grow from the inside outward. The Apostle Paul said, "We are strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man" (Ephesians 3:16), good conduct being an eventual result of that strength and growth. In spite of much help from well-meaning people, many have learned to overcome these obstacles by simply concentrating on getting to know Him better.

Paul also said, "Yea, indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8). It is apparent that Paul, who wrote 14 books of the New Testament, entered into a true and lasting partnership with the Lord.

Another problem in our relationship with God can develop when we, as believers, become only socially attracted to a church. We love to go to church. We love the singing; we love the choir; we like the preacher, but we neglect our personal commitment to the Lord. The word "personal" needs emphasis here. We need a one-on-one growing relationship with the Lord. If the extent of our experience with the Lord never goes any further than what we absorb on Sunday in church, then it will be a very shallow experience. As a father wants his children to be close to him, so God desires to draw us even closer to Himself.

The purpose of this booklet is to point out some specific areas that will help us understand what our relationship with the Lord should include. You will find three specific areas mentioned, which we might call principles, facts, or elements, which are all proven to work. When applied, these will cause our relationship with the Lord to grow. He wants us to become full grown, mature Christians. He not only wants us to be able to receive all that He has paid for us to have while we are on earth, but that we may also build treasure to lay up in heaven. May the Lord bless you as you read. -- D. R. A.

I. WORSHIP

As human beings, we have a tendency to attempt to please God by our service. Service is good, but generally, our service is for God and to men. God wants us to develop our relationship with Him, of which worship is a very important part. Our worship is for God and to God. If He had to choose between the two, He would accept our worship above our service.

THE PLACE OF WORSHIP

"The woman said to Him, Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship. Jesus said unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is

Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:19-24). As Jesus spoke these words to the Samaritan woman, she likely did not understand all that He was saying to her. There have been misunderstandings about the place of worship since that time, even today. Some people would say, "This church is the house of God," or "You must come to this church to worship." A church building is the house of God only in the sense that it is dedicated to His purpose. He does not dwell there as He did in the tabernacle in the wilderness, or later in Solomon's temple. He dwells in us, His people. And this clearly is the point that Jesus would make here, that worship would no longer be confined to a geographical location, or to certain buildings, but only to the spirit of the worshipper. So now, the place of worship is our spirit because He dwells within us (I Corinthians 3:16). We can see the importance then, that it is not so much where we worship, but that we do worship.

A variety of Greek words for worship were translated into English in the New Testament, bearing out these meanings: "to honor, to serve, to pay homage, to revere." Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words explains: "Worship is not confined to praise. Broadly, it may be regarded as the direct acknowledgement of God, of His nature, His attributes, His ways and claims, whether by the outgoing of the heart in praise and thanksgiving or by deed done in such acknowledgement." The term "acknowledgement," seems to be a very inclusive word, taking into consideration all of the definitions of worship. Just think, in the course of our busy days, if we will stop and say, "Yes, Lord, I can see your hand in this," or "Thank You, God, for helping me in this situation," we are actually worshipping God, by simply acknowledging Him in our lives. We have heard nature-lovers who say, "I don't need to go to church, I can worship God in creation." Yes, we can worship God in creation by acknowledging His hand in it. He is the One who created every living thing. Many of us spend a great deal of our waking hours in a world of concrete and steel. It is refreshing, occasionally, to see a part of the world as God made it, by taking a hike into the woods, spending a day at a lake, or just driving into the countryside. We can appreciate His handiwork.

Here, we see the requirements of Israel under the law. The first portion of the Ten Commandments was man's responsibility to God. Jesus summarized this portion when He spoke these words to Satan, "Away with you Satan! For it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve" (Matthew 4:10). It is more than just the requirements of the Law. Through these Scriptures, we begin to understand the heart of God. He says, "I am a jealous God." As much as a husband would expect faithfulness from his wife, so also God wants His people to be faithful and true to Him. He wants us to acknowledge Him. He wants to become the focus of our attention. He would like to be our one object of worship.

"And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy . . . Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, see that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God" (Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9). Twice the Apostle John mistakenly bowed down to worship an angel. Notice the advice given to him on both occasions, "WORSHIP GOD!"

Jesus said, "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30). He also said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). The Father and the Son are identified together as God. As we acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ, we are in turn paying homage to God the Father, and vice versa. God is to be the Object of worship. So then, if there is to be any responsibility on our part regarding worship, the message would be very simple: Worship God! Worship God!

UNOBJECTIVE WORSHIP

"Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to

all life, breath, and all things. And He made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him, though He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:22-27).

As the Apostle Paul ministered to these people, he became aware of how unobjective, or "religious" they were. The problem in Athens was idolatry, as described earlier in this same chapter in Acts. Paul had a real desire to make the "unknown" known to them, and some did accept his ministry and believed. We have a similar problem like the Athenians -- not idol worship or bowing down before images necessarily, but we put things on a level of higher importance than God. Whether it is money, material possessions, or another person that we esteem more important to us than God, we also can become unobjective in our worship.

But we have come to know the "Unknown." Praise the Lord! Through His Word we can become more acquainted with Him. We also have the Holy Spirit, who was sent to instruct us concerning the purpose, the principles, and the power of God in Christ Jesus. (See John 16:13-15). So we have a lot going for us which those first century people did not.

Notice also what Paul says: "God ... does not dwell in temples made with hands." Where does He dwell? He dwells in us! (Acts 7:48; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20). We, as Christians, collectively become a temple or habitation of the Lord (Ephesians 2:21-22). What a wonder to think that the God of all creation, the One who spoke the universe into existence, the El Shaddai (Almighty God), of the Old Testament, chooses to reside in you and me! Not only as a group, but also as individuals, we have become the house of the Lord, God's temple. Certainly this should inspire us to worship. Yes, God is, He wants to be, and should be, the One Object of worship in our lives. We do not want to be unobjective by moving Him down on our list of priorities.

THE CALL TO WORSHIP

"Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our Salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. For the Lord is the great God, and the great King above all gods. In His hand are the deep places of the earth, the heights of the hills are His also. The sea is His, for He made it; and His hands formed the dry land. Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker" (Psalm 95:1-6). "Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! Sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless His Name; proclaim the Good News of His Salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all people. For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Honor and majesty are before Him; strength and beauty are in His sanctuary. Give to the Lord, O families of the peoples, give to the Lord glory and strength. Give to the Lord the glory due His Name; bring an offering, and come into His courts. Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth" (Psalm 96:1-9).

What a call David must have had on his life! His heart's desire was to live for God -- to love, to honor, to revere, to exalt and to serve the Lord. His worship took many forms. He sang unto the Lord. He played instruments unto the Lord. He prayed, he praised, he cried, and he danced -- all worship. But what was it that called him to this life style of worshipping God? Was it because David was so good that he was able to worship, or because he was living a spotless life? No. No. It was because God was worthy. These Scriptures express David's feelings of acknowledgement toward God for what He had done, for what He was doing, and for what He could do in the future. As we begin to understand all that God has purchased for us, and what it cost Him to buy it, we too, will be drawn by His worthiness to worship.

The four living creatures and twenty-four elders of Revelation will stand as examples of true worshippers for all time, because they will apparently gain the closest place of fellowship with the Lord in heaven (Revelation 4 and 5). They too, herald this theme -- "You are worthy." God's willingness to love and give, makes Him worthy. The Father gave His Son; The Son gave His life that we might live eternally. If God never did anything more for us, the fact of what He has already done, surely makes Him worthy of our praise and adoration.

Look again at Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman: "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth." If the true place of worship is the spirit of the believer, then true worship must come from the spirit -- not necessarily the hands, the mouth, the feet, etc. These parts of the body may be used to express our worship, but true

worship comes only from the heart. Is it possible then, for believers to go through certain motions, rituals, traditions, and even ceremonies, without really worshipping? Yes. That is why Jesus also stated, "God is Spirit, and those that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." God is looking for true worshippers today, as David was -- those who are willing to lead and take a stand. He is recruiting individuals who have a notion that there might be more to this relationship than just "being saved," or having our daily needs met. God is extending this call through the power of the Holy Spirit to His people everywhere during this Church Age. Come and worship! "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 3:22). He is calling us to true worship.

John W. Follette says in "The God of Remnants": "When Jesus ministered He did so first and primarily to the House of Israel. But He found no receptivity there, for Israel refused the message and when He found He could not minister to them, He changed his tactics. He worked His miracles, desiring to help Israel, but they still refused His help. Our Lord knew that if they would not receive Him and His message, someone else would.

"When Jesus found that the nation did not respond, He turned and did the thing He always does. When the great masses refuse to follow, He begins to deal with the remnant. Did you know that God was a God of remnants? There was a remnant among Israel who heard Him gladly and receive His message.

"The Church, as a body, has failed to respond to Him and move on with Him, so He took from her midst a remnant. He is continually sifting and sifting, and then He takes a few kernels and sifts again. Have you felt Him sifting you? He is after saints to bring them into His highest purpose for them. When the majority does not listen to the Message of Grace and have no ears to hear, He begins to sift until He finds a remnant that will listen. How many out of that great multitude on the Day of Pentecost, of five or six thousand, do you suppose, really followed Him? He had to sift continually and take out a remnant of those who would follow on into further revelations.

"Sensing the national failure, He turned to the individual and said, 'Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.' It is as if He would say, "You have walked with this burden upon you now for centuries; you have walked to the temple and have walked home again with the same burden; you have gone to the Pharisees, the scribes, and the leaders with your burden, but walked home without any peace or victory in your life. Let me tell you what to do -- COME UNTO ME."

"He is inviting the individual into personal contact with Himself -- His true and lasting dealings are always with the individual -- the remnant."

(II) TRUST

Trust is a term that applies to relationships; not only our relationship with God, but our earthly relationships as well. Ideally this is an element which works mutually between parents and children; husbands and wives; good friends; employers and employees, etc. Trust means: "To have faith, to feel secure, to entrust, to place confidence in, to sell on credit" (Webster).

Would we sell something to a person on credit if we did not trust him? How can we have a good relationship with someone we do not trust? Would a married couple grow closer together if there was not a bond of trust between them? Trust is important in our relationships with people. We would like to be able to say of people who are close to us, "They meant what they said and they said what they meant; they've proven to be faithful one hundred percent."

WHY WE CAN TRUST GOD

Only God is faithful one hundred percent, but how can our relationship grow with Him if we do not believe that? "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

Our trust in God is built on the premise of our initial faith. We believed His Word -- that the record of God's Son was true, and we exercised that faith unto salvation. But salvation is just the beginning. There is so much that God wants to do in us and through us. Our ability to trust Him grows as our faith grows. As we spend time reading and meditating on God's Word, our faith grows and becomes stronger, and we find that we are able to trust Him more. To trust is to have faith.

If we do not have enough confidence in God to believe that He will do for us all that He says in His Word that He will do for His people, then something is wrong. God does not change! The following are a few specific verses that declare this fact: "I will never leave you nor forsake you . . .

. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:5, 8). "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

There is no variation with God. Even though He has dealt differently with men in different ages, He remains the same. His purposes and principles remain unchangeable. God is Love; He is Mercy; He is Grace; He is Kindness. God has always had ability. He has retained His sovereignty throughout history. He has always been able to save and to heal, to create life, and to quicken the dead, to restore the blind and the leper, to raise up nations and to destroy them. In all this, God has not changed!

A PROBLEM

Why is it then, that we fail to trust God in our lives for more than "just being saved"? Because we are the ones who change. Many have heard or read this saying: "If God seems far away, who do you think has moved?" That's right. We are the ones who move. We are the fickle ones. We have a heart that wants to serve Him, but our flesh is often weak. We can trust Him that we are going to heaven, but can we trust Him for life on earth? Do we trust Him when we pray, that He will answer according to His will? Do we trust Him for healing when we or a family member are sick. Do we trust Him for important decisions, that He will make the answer clear? Can we trust Him for the right house or the right car? Yes we can, but we do not always - because of our instability. God is not only able, but He is willing to meet all our needs. He is completely trustworthy. His ability has not changed, but our ability to trust Him does change.

THE ANSWER

"For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia; that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us" (II Corinthians 1:8-10). From these verses of the apostle's experience, whom do we learn not to trust in? Ourselves. And in whom do we learn to trust? God. If there is something that we are not able to trust the Lord for, if we cannot trust Him in everything and for anything, chances are we are trusting ourselves. Often we unintentionally place too much confidence in our own ability. We trust ourselves, and sometimes, other people, be it a doctor, psychologist, or maybe our own pastor. People have far less ability and capability to direct our path than God does. They are not nearly so resourceful as God is, when it comes to knowing us or meeting our needs. God can and does use Christians to minister one to another, but we really need to put our complete faith, confidence, and trust in Him. He has our very best interest in mind.

We do not see and understand the way God does. He sees the end from the beginning. He knows what the finished product should look like. He has a special plan for each of our lives and He knows what we need to produce those specific desired results. So many times, we can see no farther than the circumstances that surround us at any given time. We might think to ourselves, "I don't like this situation ... I don't see what possible good can come from this." Or we might feel, "I don't like the way the Lord answered my prayer ... I want out of this." We may never say these things to anyone, or to the Lord, but by our attitude and our actions we say, "I am taking back control of my own life." It is at times like these that plan "A" (God's Plan) stops and plan "B" (our plan) takes over. Fortunately for us, because God is gracious and merciful, He has ways of getting us back on the right track.

Some of the hardest things in life for us to go through in the natural, work the best in us spiritually. Remember, ... "the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:3-4).

Solomon said: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your path" (Proverbs 3:5-6). When seeking direction in our lives, it is a good thing to rely on the Lord's understanding. When we learn, we also need to lean on Him. Sometimes we learn a lesson the hard way -- through failure. We attempt to direct our own course rather than trusting in the Lord with all of our heart. So if we were to be given any responsibility regarding this principle of trust in our relationship with the Lord, the message once again, would be very simple. Trust God! Trust God!

WHAT TO TRUST GOD FOR

(1) LIFE. If someone told you that your christian life would be a bed of roses, or a flower-strewn pathway, they were right; but they only told you half the story. Our lives can be filled with joy, peace, and happiness. God has provided the means for us to prosper in every way -- in the natural, but especially in the spiritual. We can enjoy very blessed lives. As Christians however, we also have our share of disappointment, heartache, grief, discouragement, and even depression. The expectations we have of life is a greater burden than we can bear at times. The expectations we have of ourselves are more than we can live up to. We need to trust God for our lives in general, that somehow (though we might not see immediate evidence), He is going to work all things for our good in the end.

Job said: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Chapter 13:15). God does not want to kill us. In fact, when we are tested, He expects our faith to stand and be strengthened. His purpose in allowing us to be tried is not that we should fail or be defeated. We need the same kind of positive confidence in God that Job had, that no matter what comes into our lives, we will trust Him!

(2) PARENTHOOD. This is a mission field that many share. God has granted us a special responsibility of raising children who would honor Him. We need to trust the Lord for special ability to be the example that is necessary for our children to have a desire to follow Him. We must be channels of God's love to them. And yet, this is an assignment where we cannot trust our own natural ability as parents. We have a tendency to be impulsive. We make hasty decisions that affect our children, rather than waiting on God for direction. We need to trust Him that we will be a positive influence on their lives. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

Vital Link to God

"It is not the will of your Father which is in Heaven, that one of these little ones should perish". -- Matt. 18:14

(3) CHILDREN/TEENS

Adolescence is a social term that defines youth en route to adulthood. It corresponds somewhat to puberty in the physical. These years are commonly filled with temptation. As a young person, we have not had several years of experience in applying God's Word in our lives, yet temptation runs rampant. New things come our way that are difficult for us to deal with. There are so many changes; there are also many voices that would tell us what is right for our lives. Which voice can we trust? God's voice! We can trust His voice in His infallible Word. Even though it may seem old fashioned, God's Word is true. It has stood the test of time, and Bible principles have been proven to work for many generations.

Of all the temptations we as young Christians face, they could generally be characterized by two headings: Sexual desires and Peer pressure. In contemporary language, it seems that the Lord would say regarding sexual desires: "Keep it clean," and regarding peer pressure, "Do what's right." We need to trust God for strength to stand in times of temptation, and that He will always show us that one door that is open. "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man, but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (I Corinthians 10:13).

As young Christians, we also need to trust God for our parents. Not all Christian children have Christian parents. If our parents have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we need to pray and trust God that the Holy Spirit will continue to deal with their hearts. Also, we need to trust God that we might be examples to them of His love through obedience: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1).

We do not always learn good things from our parents. Sometimes we learn what "not to do," or what "not to be like." Sometimes, bad habits and tendencies are passed from one generation to another. For example: abusive parents often have children who become abusive parents. Abusive husbands often raise sons who become abusive with their wives and children. Alcohol and smoking habits are picked up by young people, not to mention other serious drugs. We need to trust God that whatever we observe in our parents, will produce a positive influence in our lives.

(4) PASTORS/MINISTERS.

Pastors, especially, need to rely on the Lord every day in making decisions concerning the body

of believers to whom they are responsible to minister. As a pastor, we would need to trust God for direction continually to effectively meet the needs of the people. We would need direction in what to teach or preach, directions for our assistants in the same, direction in finances, funerals, foreign missions, etc., even down to the very clothes we wear. As a pastor, we would be a front-line ambassador for Christ, representing not only the Church, but also the ministry of Jesus Christ to the world.

Most of us have, or will be, called upon to minister in some measure. It might be something as simple as telling a friend what the Lord has done in our life. Trust God for the right words. May our words always be to edification, exhortation, and comfort. Whether we sing, or speak, or write, we need to trust God that those on the receiving end of our ministry will not be wasting their time, but that they will be encouraged, even as our hearts were blessed and enlarged when we received the message.

If God has called us to a ministry of service, trust Him for the resources to carry it out. Apostle Peter said: "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; not as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:2-3).

RESULTS

When We Trust in Ourselves --

- (1) Guilt. Past failures haunt us as we experiment in directing our own lives.
- (2) Fear of the future. We have no assurance that we will not "goof up" as we did so many other times. "I'll just have to try harder next time." Right? Wrong!

When We Trust God --

- (1) He has forgiven the past. Unlike people, God forgives. People like to keep failures on record and dredge them up again and again at opportune times. If we are truly sorry, God is able to forgive our sins, our failures, and our mistakes. AND THEN HE FORGETS THEM!
- (2) There is no fear of the future. We can move on to our future with confidence, knowing that God has mapped out our lives. He sees each turn in the road. He knows where each obstacle is and He will lead us on to our destination if we will just trust Him.

David shares with us 44 times in the Psalms about trusting the Lord. Notice just a few results: "We will have no shame" (31:1). "He will provide a testimony before men" (31:19). "Our needs are met and our prayers are answered" (37:3-5). "We have deliverance from the wicked" (37:40). "We have security, peace, and protection" (91:4).

If we want real harmony in our relationship with the Lord, we need to trust Him. Let us put the responsibility of directing our lives in the hands of Someone who can handle it -- God. TRUST GOD!

John W. Peterson put it well in his song:

God Knows All About Tomorrow
God has measured time's duration,
Night and day are His creation,
And the changing seasons of the year;
He's the One who watches o'er me
And prepares the way before me;
There is nothing now I need to fear.
Life's uncertainties may haunt me,
Foolish fears may try to taunt me,
Till My heart is filled with doubt and dread;
He who set the planets spinning
Sees the end from the beginning,
He will keep me through the days ahead.
All the world is in confusion,
"Peace on earth" is but illusion,
And the phrase seems only a cliché,
But in trying times so fearful

I can still be calm and cheerful,
And with glad assurance I can say:
God knows all about tomorrow,
He can see beyond today;
Be it filled with joy or sorrow,
He has planned it that way.
So I do not fear the future
On His promises I stand;
God knows all about tomorrow,
For He holds it in His Hand!

(III) FELLOWSHIP

Some might ask, "Isn't fellowship and relationship the same thing?" No, but fellowship can be an important part of relationship. Our relationship with God exists because of HIS love and mercy. He purchased a gift for us; He offered it to us; we accepted. We now have a relationship with Him. Fellowship with God begins with our desire to return His love, to live for Him and to walk with Him. God does not force us to reciprocate His love. We have a choice. We can remain "baby Christians" the rest of our lives or we may choose to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We will see then, how vital this third element is to a good, strong and growing relationship with the Lord.

FELLOWSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER

"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7). Many of us associate the term "fellowship" with social get-togethers: Fellowship meetings, Fellowship dinners, Fellowship picnics, Fellowship groups, etc. These are sometimes held in a Fellowship Hall or Fellowship room. These undertakings are generally worthwhile and usually promote unity in the Body of Christ. No question about it -- we need each other! There is power in numbers, and we may very well be drawn to a closer walk with the Lord when we fellowship one another. We think of this word, then, in terms of fun, food, and Christian friends, but this is too often an almost exclusively horizontal view of fellowship. As much as we enjoy being with other believers, how often do we think of fellowship in regard to our relationship with the Lord?

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

"And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (I John 1:3). "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (I Corinthians 1:9). This brings vertical perspective to the word, "fellowship." We see that the real focus of our fellowship needs to be on God the Father and God the Son. We notice also our call. God wants to have fellowship with His children. Once again, it is our choice. It seems that before the very foundation of the world God wanted harmony between Himself and His creation. Mankind sinned and the harmony was broken. This sin created a great gulf between God and man. As a result we could not reach out to God; we could not enter into His presence, and He could not have fellowship with us. But He cared enough to make a sacrifice. He loved us enough to give His best to redeem us from the curse of sin. That love and care became Mary's little Son - - Jesus. Yes, Jesus is the One who spanned the gulf. He became the bridge over the deep chasm that brought mankind to God. God could now say, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Paul wrote: "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). What an awesome privilege it is, that we have access to the throne of grace -- to be able to enter into His presence without an appointment, to become strengthened and encouraged along the way! Fellowship has been restored! Let us take time to fellowship with God now!

A CLOSER LOOK

Koinonia, is the Greek term from which fellowship is translated many times in the New Testament. It means: communion, communication, and a sharing in common. We will look a little

closer at each of these terms.

COMMUNION. This word speaks of closeness and intimacy. It relates to partnership. We think of the Lord's Supper, often referred to as "Communion." This is a specific time set aside when we are called to remember Jesus' body that was broken for us and of His blood that was shed for us. This can and should be an occasion of real spiritual interchange of God relating to us and we relating to Him -- Communion.

COMMUNICATION. We, as God's children, communicate to Him in different ways, but usually our communication could be labeled, "prayer." There are different kinds of prayers: one of thanksgiving, or a prayer of intercession (in behalf of someone else). Whatever the case, more often than not, we come to God asking. We have a long list of needs and maybe even a few wishes thrown in with our entreaty. Shame on us though, if God only exists to simply meet our needs. Should it be that a child speaks to his parent only when he wants something? Good communication between two parties requires that one party listen. God listens to us; He hears us when we speak and knows our very thoughts. Do we listen when He speaks? There are so many things that we can learn from Him if we will not only talk, but listen. God communicates a bit differently with us than we do with Him. He has written us letters, several in fact, and we can always look back to see on the printed page if we have forgotten just what He was saying. He can also communicate to us in our spirit. See Romans 8:16 and Proverbs 20:27. What a wonderful thing, to communicate with the Living God!

SHARING IN COMMON. This definition of fellowship is perhaps the most thought provoking. We could make a long list of things that we share in common with other believers -- the same Savior, the same Gospel, the same beliefs, maybe the same Church, etc. But let us look at some things that we could share in common with God:

(1). The same Pathway. This is where we walk. God has established a path for us to take. When we choose to take the way that He has set before us, we walk with Him. And we can be assured that He will be there with us all the way to lead us, to support and protect us. "Footprints in the Sand" is a well known lyric that tells the story of a Christian looking back over two sets of footprints in the sand. As the prints represented his walk through life with the Lord, he assumed when one set of tracks disappeared that the Lord must have left him on his own. But he was told that it was at his very weakest moment that the Lord picked him up and carried him, thus only one set of prints in the sand could be seen. God is on our side! He is going to be there always for us! "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31)

"And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Genesis 5:24). "By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, and was not found, because God had taken him; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Hebrews 11:5). We read very little of Enoch. We know very little about his life, except for the words of his testimony -- "he walked with God and he pleased Him." But we can imagine a hand-in-hand relationship. What God wanted, Enoch wanted. Enoch's will was surrendered to God's will. And where God walked, Enoch shared the pathway in common with Him.

"But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. This is the genealogy of Noah. He was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:8-9). This man also, made a choice to fellowship with God. This choice was proven by his obedience through the remainder of his life. Just prior to the destruction of Sodom (See Genesis 18-19), as we compare the attitudes of Abraham and his nephew Lot, we find that Abraham was much more interested in fellowshiping with the Lord at His visitation. Lot would have hurried the visitors on their way, but Abraham was reluctant to let them go. Abraham knew what fellowship with God was. God had called him from a pagan land. He answered God's call and shared the pathway in common with the Lord the rest of his days. He made mistakes, as any of us, but God honored him and designated him as "My friend." (Isaiah 41:8)

Many other Bible characters could be mentioned, but a point to consider here is this: as we share with God, He shares with us, not only in the spiritual realm, but in abundant life blessings. If we choose to make a commitment of sharing our pathway with the Lord, it does not mean that we will lead "ho-hum, hum drum, poverty stricken" lives with no excitement and no fun. Some have the opinion that if it's fun, it must be sin. Not so. The truth is that when we are willing to dedicate our lives to the Lord, including our possessions, our talents, our rights, and even our expectations, He can return these to us as privileges (Matthew 6:31-33). We stand to reap eternal rewards for a life

style that is pleasing to God.

(2). The same dwelling. This really is not an option. As believers, we do share the same dwelling with the Lord. We looked at Scriptures earlier that point out that we are the temple of the Lord. Why then, do many Christians live their lives apparently unconscious of this fact? Why do we do some of the things we do? How can we allow ourselves to bring disappointment to the Lord? As saints of God, we have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us (Romans 8:9-10). We can also be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). Likewise, we are to find our existence in Him. A key theme in the book of Ephesians is the phrase "in Him." It is in Christ Jesus that we find security, fulfillment, position, promises and victory. Peter put it this way, "As His divine power has given to us all

things that pertain to life and Godliness" (II Peter 1:3). Paul wrote that it is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). He also said, "For in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). So He dwells in us, but we should also dwell in Him. If we can only remain conscious of these things, our lives will reflect that we are sharing the same dwelling with the Lord. We will bring honor and glory to His Name.

(3). Our time. Of all the things that we have in our possession, time, has got to be one of the most priceless. For most of us, it would seem that there is never enough; we could use 25 hours in a day and eight days a week for starters. We are constantly trying to save time; we try to make time, but in fact, as someone said, "we can only spend it." It would be interesting for each of us to keep a log to see how much time we spend on different activities in a week's time. A truck driver who is home only two days a week must spend time with his wife and children in order to maintain a good relationship with them. If he watched TV for the two days he has with them, he has spent time, but probably has not fellow-shipped with them. If he has a ten minute devotional and a family discussion, yet spends the remainder of the two days with friends, he has not shared much of his time with them. It takes a combination -- time and fellowship.

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me" (John 15:4). The word "abide" is closely related to fellowship, but it brings in the element of time. It bears out the thought of residing, or dwelling continually (spending time). Rather than literally being held in the arms of Jesus, this word would indicate an attitude of continual dependency. Are we willing to fellowship with God continually? Out of 168 hours in a week, we spend roughly: 10 hours eating, 40-60 hours sleeping, several hours watching TV, as much as three hours in the shower, and hopefully a little over an hour brushing and flossing, just to mention a few activities. How much time do we spend in fellowship with the Lord? The writer of the book of Hebrews said, "For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His Name" (Hebrews 13:14-15). To share in common with the Lord something as valuable as our time, would undoubtedly be received as a sacrifice. The Apostle Paul wrote, "But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on, even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice" (I Corinthians 7:29-30). James compared our lives to a vapor (4:14). It is true what a short time we will spend on this earth. What are a few years in comparison with eternity? And yet, every moment counts. We may look at each day as a new day filled with opportunity, to seek His will in our lives and help fulfill His purposes. Look at the signs. The sun is going down on this world. This age is coming to a close and Jesus is coming soon.

(4). His Glory. Jesus said, "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3-4). God's Word says, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified" (Romans 8:29-30). Have we been called? Yes. Have we been justified? Yes. And the way God reckons, we have been glorified, even though it has not yet physically happened. We still live in mortal bodies. We have this treasure in earthen vessels. So will we share in His glory? Yes, yes, yes!

The Bible says, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but

then I shall know just as I also am known" (I Corinthians 13:12). There are many things that we do not understand yet. The glory that we are going to share with Jesus Christ is one of those things that is beyond our comprehension. We can only imagine or speculate as to what it will be like. Our knowledge in this area is very limited, but we can believe that it will be glorious and out of this world. John, the apostle wrote, "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (I John 3:2).

So then, as born-again children of God, we are qualified heirs to share in His glory. (See Romans 8:16-18) A careful study of the book of Revelation would indicate that though we are all believers and heirs, our position and rewards will vary. Other Scriptures that suggest this are: Matthew 25:14-28, I Corinthians 3:11-15, 9:24-27, II Corinthians 5:10, Philipians 3:7-14, II Timothy 4:7-8. To put it simply, what we will have in the hereafter depends on what we do in the here and now. Life is a training time for reigning time. Eternal life is a gift, but our inheritance depends on what we do with Him. "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

"HIM"

S. D. Gordon tells of a saint of God, who had committed to memory long passages of the Bible in her youth, but as the years passed and her strength diminished, so her memory weakened too. No longer was she able to quote these passages at will, and after a time, one verse alone remained -- "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day" (II Timothy 1:12).

In the last few weeks of life, when she hovered between life and death, the feebleness increased. Her loved ones noticed her lips moving, and thinking she might be needing something, bent down to listen to her request. Time and again they found her repeating one word, "Him, Him, Him." She had lost the whole Bible but for one word, yet really, in S. D. Gordon's glowing words, in that word she had the whole Bible. She had sufficient for this life and the next in that word, "Him." The Man of the Book, the Man of all Life!"

A PRAYER

Lord, I thank you for all that you have provided for and given to me through the sacrifice of your Son, Jesus Christ. Heavenly Father, create in me a real desire to want to live for you, and to be pleasing to you. Help me to be the kind of child, the kind of servant, and the kind of friend that you would want. Take my hand in your's, Lord, and lead me through this life ... I want to walk with you ... I need your wisdom and strength. Teach me Lord ... how to worship you, and how to trust you more, and how to fellowship with you, that my relationship with you will continue to grow. In Jesus' Name and until He comes. Amen!

THE END