

Fulton County Gospel News

"The Churches of Christ Salute You"

Second Class Postage Paid at Mammoth Spring, Ark.

Volume 12

Mammoth Spring, Arkansas 72554

June 1979

Number 19

Naaman's Blunders A Heart Problem

By Harold Turner

II Kings 5:1-14 records the story of Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, and the cleansing of his leprosy. Naaman is pictured as a great man, and honourable, but a leper. He is spoken of as an honourable man with his king, the Lord, and even by those taken captive by him. His greatness had been achieved by his goodness and fairness. Jesus even indicated the greatness of this man, saying, "And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian." (Luke 4:27.)

But as great and honourable as Naaman might have been, he made some great blunders in his efforts to find a cure for his leprosy. A little maid, taken captive from Israel, expressed to Naaman's wife, "Would God my Lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! For he would recover him of his leprosy." Since there were no known cures for leprosy, the only hope for Naaman was to find the one man that could cure him of this disease.

Naaman's first blunder was in going to the wrong man. The king of Syria wrote a letter to the king of Israel, and sent it by Naaman. The letter stated, "Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy." When the king of Israel received this letter he rent his clothes, and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?" We are not told why Naaman went to the king of Israel rather than to the prophet Elisha, but it is obvious that he had gone to the wrong man, and in all probability, Naaman would have done whatever the king instructed him. But only Elisha had the true remedy to Naaman's problem.

Naaman's blunder is a mistake that many make today in their efforts to get rid of sin. There is only one person that has the answer to this problem - Jesus Christ. His word contains the only formula that will cleanse us. If we go to the wrong person, we will, in turn, receive the wrong formula. Just think of some of the things people are being instructed to do. One will tell

you that there is nothing that a person can do but wait upon the grace of God to save him. Another will tell us to just believe on the Lord Jesus, and he will save us, save us by faith alone. Another will tell us that just being sincere, no matter what doctrine one believes, will suffice. Then another tells us that we cannot be saved unless we get prayed through. On and on the different answers are given. Jesus said that a person could not come to him except he had been taught of God, and that only those who had heard and learned of the Father, could come, John 6:44-45. The only way one can get rid of sin is by doing what God has commanded. We must be sure that what we believe and do is what Jesus has instructed, for, like Elisha, he alone has the remedy.

The second blunder that Naaman made was that he decided for himself how Elisha was to perform the cure. When Naaman arrived at the place where Elisha was, the prophet sent a messenger unto him, saying, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." Here was God's remedy, just simply wash seven times in Jordan and be clean. But Naaman had another idea. He said, "Behold, I thought, he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." Naaman got angry when his idea was not accepted. Obviously he had clearly reasoned this matter out, and what the prophet suggested not only conflicted with his ideas, but was ridiculous. Who ever heard of water washing away leprosy? This was nothing short of water salvation, cutting God completely out of the picture. So Naaman went away in a rage at this ridiculous idea.

Naaman's second blunder is one that many make today. Jesus is the only hope, the only Saviour. Jesus told the apostles to preach the gospel to every creature in every nation, and added, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved . . ." (Mark 16:15, 16.) These men preached that all must "Repent, and be baptized . . ."

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By Lavern Stewart

A problem that occurs again and again is to get members of the church to attend on Sunday night and on Wednesday night. God forbid that I judge, but when one of God's children does not want to attend any service except Sunday morning and gets red in the face, stiffens his neck, and grits his teeth, and says, "Show me where it says we are to attend any service except Sunday morning." I wonder how much that person loves the Lord. Our Lord promised to be with the people who gathered together in his name, Matt. 18:20. In this passage, Jesus was not talking about our assembling on the Lord's day to break bread, but rather of children of God meeting together to PRAY. Naturally, he is with us when we meet to break bread, yet that was not the specific subject under consideration in the passage just quoted. Further, if one wants some passage that speaks of the church meeting other than on the Lord's day, here it is, Acts 2:46, "And day by day continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart." Also read Acts 19:9, where Paul reasoned daily in the school of Tyrannus; surely he had the disciples with him because it had just said he separated them from the rest.

It is no lack of passages that teach it, but a HEART PROBLEM which keeps members from coming to every service. Should we do as little as we can for the Lord, or as much as we can for him? How much did he do for us? We are informed that God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, Eph. 3:20. However, are we to expect his blessings in the absence of our heartily serving him? That which is done heartily (Col. 3:23) will not try to do the least for God, but rather the most. Consider this passage, 1 John 3:22, "And whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight." Do you WANT to please God? Do you WANT to encourage others, and set a good example before children - yours and others? Brethren, seek FIRST the kingdom in all areas. Carry the cross, Luke 9:23.

**FULTON COUNTY
GOSPEL NEWS**

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EDITORS: Erwin Cowen
and Harold Turner

CONTRIBUTIONS

Churches of Christ

Agnos.....	5.00
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Elizabeth.....	5.00
Garfield.....	15.00
Viola.....	5.00
Williford.....	5.00

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"We easily forgive our friends those faults that personally do not touch us."

"We try to ennoble those faults which we do not wish to correct."

"We would often be ashamed of our finest acts, if the world were aware of the motives behind them."

"Quarrels would not last long, if the wrong were only on one side."

"We admit our small failings only in order to persuade others that we have no greater ones."

"For the most of mankind, gratitude is no more than a secret wish to receive even greater benefits."

"We are so accustomed to disguising ourselves from others, that we end by disguising ourselves from ourselves."

Saved By Grace

By Glynn V. Purdy

The English word, "grace," is translated from the Greek word, "charis," and means "graciousness," or as we often state, "unmerited favor." The idea of grace is to receive something through another's graciousness which we do not merit and which we cannot totally repay. It is something that is free. When we speak of God's grace, in a broad sense, it means everything God has done in behalf of man. Grace is God's part in man's salvation. Man's part includes his complete obligation to God, and this part is covered under faith. Therefore, faith on man's part and grace on God's part brings about salvation, Eph. 2:8-9.

How is grace administered to man's sins? How does it work? We know that the Holy Spirit was sent by Christ to convict man of his sins. This was done through the word of God - the gospel. Christ is the Saviour, but he saves only those who obey the gospel (Mark 16:15-16). Since Christ does the saving, it is important that we know how and when.

The grace of God saves us, but how and when? In John 1:17 we learn that "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." The grace of God is revealed through the testimony of God's word, Acts 14:3. Since man's part in salvation involves faith, we know that if he does not exercise his faith, grace is void, James 2:24-26. In Rom. 10:17 we learn that faith comes from hearing God's word. So if there can be no faith apart from the gospel, apart from the gospel grace cannot be applied to our sins. It takes grace and faith to save. There can be no faith or grace apart from the gospel, therefore man is saved through the gospel.

James 2:14-26 teaches that faith is perfected by works, that faith without works is dead, and that we are justified by works and not by faith alone. So works are included in salvation, and all good works are revealed in the word of God, 2 Tim. 3:16, 17. So in order to be saved one must do the works required by God in the gospel. Salvation is free through grace, but God has attached conditions whereby we may become a recipient of this free salvation. It is free, it is unmerited, but it is conditional to the recipient, otherwise every one would be saved. For example, a man may establish a savings account for his son, it is free, of grace. The father may, however, attach a condition that the son must finish college before becoming a recipient. When the son finishes college, did he earn the money? No, he just complied with the re-

quired condition. The money was still a gift, it was given free, it was by grace. The same is true of the person who complies with God's condition attached to his grace. Man earns nothing by doing God's will. He just meets the conditions which God revealed in the Bible.

Man is justified by Christ's grace, and becomes an heir by the same, Titus 3:7. Yet, man is justified by the blood of Christ, Rom. 5:9. We reach the death and blood of Christ when we obey the gospel by being baptized into Christ, Rom. 6:3, 4. We then are justified by grace, the blood of Christ, and by obeying the gospel.

If we were saved by grace only, then we would have universal salvation, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men. Teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." (Titus 2:11, 12.) This shows that the grace of God comes to us through the gospel of Christ, telling us what to give up, and what to embrace, what to repent of, and what to do by faith. Grace has appeared to all, but all do not meet the conditions of denying and embracing its teaching.

The Gospel is truth (John 17:17), and we purify our souls in obeying the truth (1 Peter 1:22), and we are born again (without which we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven) by the word of God (1 Peter 1:23). It is easy to understand that no one can become a recipient of God's grace until he meets the conditions presented in the word of grace - the gospel of Jesus Christ.

If we are saved by grace only (all on God's part), if we were to fall it would be God's fault. But we have instructions to follow to keep us from falling. For example, Peter lists several things that we must do, and adds, "If ye do these things ye will not fall, 2 Peter 1:5-10. The Galatians were saved by grace through faith, yet some had "fallen from grace," Gal. 5:4. The Galatians were saved by faith, but faith had to work according to God's will, for grace is only applied through a working faith. Therefore when the Galatians failed to continue to obey God (Gal. 3:1) they fell from grace. The obedient faith through which grace flowed was dried up. It was man's fault, not God's. Grace is there for all, but we must do what grace teaches us to do before we can be saved.

False Doctrines In The Early Church

By Clovis Ragsdale

The church for which Jesus died, and which began on the day of Pentecost, has been greatly hindered by false teachers. This is not only true in our day, but the problem of false teachers began before all the apostles died. Numerous Scriptures teach and warn that this would happen. The problem even existed in the days of Christ. In Matt. 15:7-9 Jesus said, "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

Paul gave many warnings about the dangers of false teachers. He warned the Galatians, saying, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." (Gal. 1:8.) He warned the elders at Ephesus, saying, "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch . . ." (Acts 20:29-31.) He warned Timothy to "Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." (2 Tim. 4:2-4.)

Since the death of the apostles, we are indebted to church historians for a knowledge of how the church fared after the first century. A few of these writers were, Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Ploycarp, Justin Martyr, and others. Their writings have been preserved, and tell of some of the doctrines and movements in the church that were contrary to the teachings of the New Testament. Some of these movements were referred to as the Docetic and Gnostic movements, and the teachings of Marcion and Montanus.

Gnostic comes from a Greek word meaning "to know." The Gnostics believed salvation to be obtained through intellectual means. They believed that all material things were evil. They had a very fertile imagination, from which many theories were set forth, but they were not united in all their ideas. The Gnostic's

religion was a mixture of a little Christianity, a little Judaism, a little philosophy, some ideas taken from pagan religions, and the mystical religions of the East. The Gnostics influenced and led astray many from the faith. However, their radical views and lack of unity proved their downfall over the years.

Docetism is the belief that Christ did not really suffer on the cross, but rather that he just "seemed" to suffer. The word "docetic" means "to seem." To these crucifixion was not an actual fact but only a semblance of reality. This doctrine never became as prominent as Gnosticism, and therefore had less effect upon the church.

Marcion was born in 85 A.D. He was the son of Sinope, and elder of the church in Pontus. He was rich, intelligent, zealous, and a skillful organizer. He was very generous in giving of his wealth to the church, and became very influential. He believed that the church was drifting into legalism, exalting the letter above the spirit, as the Jews had done under the law. However, he went to the extreme in advocating that the Old Testament be thrown away and that the God of the Old Testament was a different being than the God of the New Testament. The church at Rome withdrew from him in 144 A.D. after which he formed his own Marcionite church. His movement showed great missionary zeal and spread extensively, drawing away many followers of the true church. This movement survived for about three hundred years.

The church, during the first few years of its existence, was unique in that it did not have the Bible for its instruction. Rather, it was nurtured by the Spirit guided apostles, and later by men upon whom the apostles had laid hands, imparting the spiritual gifts necessary to teach the word. In time the writings of the apostles had become numerous, and were circulated among the congregations. When the gospel was completed in its written form it would no longer be necessary to have Spirit inspired teachers. The written word had been given by the inspiration of God, and would take the place of inspired men. However, many were reluctant to give up the miracles - tongues, prophecies, etc. These ignored Paul's teachings that when the perfect, or complete, knowledge was given, then the miraculous parts would cease (1 Cor. 13:8-10.) The full revelation of God's word had been completed by the apostles, and was available to all. The

Spirit would now guide men only through the inspired word. This set the stage for another false teacher - Montanus.

Montanus, a worshipper of the pagan god, Cybele, was converted to Christianity. However, he continued to practice emotionalism. He claimed the Spirit guided him as it had guided the apostles, only more so. He taught a very strict way of life. He believed that marriage was permissible but that it was a lower state of life than to live in celibacy, and that if one's mate died that person could not remarry. He also taught that if a person sinned after becoming a Christian he could not be forgiven of that sin. He taught that Christ would return to earth and rule a thousand years, and even set a date for the return, which led to his downfall. This teaching caused his followers to give away their possessions, and when the day passed without Christ returning they soon became destitute, and were forced to steal food. The influence of this movement disappeared in the third century. However, it is obvious that some of Montanus' ideas have cropped up again in recent years. The efforts to stimulate emotionalism, the desire for the miraculous gifts, especially speaking in tongues, and the direct leading of the Spirit are very similar to the doctrines of Montanus.

In our present day we have many new and strange doctrines springing up almost daily. But Paul warns us, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." (Gal. 1:8.) No wonder the inspired writers gave us so many warnings against false teachers, they have been around in every generation.

"To refuse praise means that you want to be praised twice."

"Hypocrisy is a tribute that vice pays to virtue."

"We are never as happy or as unhappy as we imagine ourselves to be."

"It requires greater virtue to bear good fortune than bad."

"We make our promises according to our hopes, and keep them according to our fears."

Naaman's Blunders (Cont.)

for the remission of sins." (Acts 2:38.) And that one should be baptized to wash away his sins, Acts 22:16. But, like Naaman, many have thought this matter over carefully, and concluded that baptism can have no part in man's salvation, suggesting that this would leave God completely out of the picture. Did water wash away Naaman's leprosy? Or did God take it away when he obeyed the command to wash? It wasn't water salvation in Naaman's case, though water was required, and neither is it water salvation when we are baptized. God takes away the sin when we obey his command to be baptized. Obeying the Lord in baptism is trusting in Him for our salvation, and not cutting him out of the action. He will save when we do as he commands.

Naaman's third blunder was in wanting to offer a substitute. He said, "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage." The prophet had commanded wash seven times in Jordan. But, again Naaman doesn't want to accept God's way. Naaman could have dipped seventy times in Abana or Pharpar, but they would not have washed away his leprosy. God's way was in Jordan, and it required dipping seven times, not six.

In Naaman's third blunder we also see a problem typical to so many. To suggest a substitution for God's way is nothing short of rebellion. Cain rebelled against God when he offered a sacrifice to God of his own choosing (Gen. 4). Nadab and Abihu rebelled against God when they offered a fire of their own choosing (Lev. 10). Naaman rebelled against God by suggesting Abana and Pharpar as substitutes for Jordan. And we rebel against God when we try to substitute anything for what God has instructed. For example, men rebel against God when they suggest that sprinkling is just as good as immersion for baptism (Rom. 6:4, Col. 2:12).

God's way is the only way that any person can please him. Naaman's servant obviously recognized this. He said, "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean? Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." Naaman came close to missing this great blessing. His stubborn pride almost blinded him from being cured of his leprosy. God's way isn't always in harmony with man's reasoning. But when God

Have You Fallen Away?

By Ordell Heavin

There are many of God's children who once walked in the light, but who are no longer living a Christ controlled life. Once their life had spiritual meaning, and they rejoiced in the promise of an eternal inheritance, but now there is no longer an interest in spiritual things, and there is no joy in thinking about eternity. Eventually such a life will end in eternal destruction.

But this need not be the case in your life. Because others are drifting away from the Savior doesn't mean that you must follow them. It's true that many have turned from the truth to the doctrines and commandments of men, adding to and taking from the teachings of our Lord, but you don't have to follow them. Jesus has given us ALL truth, which, if we will follow, will make us free. The Scriptures are an all sufficient guide, we need nothing more (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Drifting away from Christ is far more dangerous than many may anticipate. It is possible to drift to the point that one cannot find it within himself to return (Heb. 6:4-6).

There are many reasons why people drift away from Christ. A careful study of some of these reasons may be profitable in helping us evaluate our own relationship with Christ. One may drift away so gradually that he isn't aware of it. Why do men fall away from the Lord?

One reason is that they do not desire that Christ be the Lord of their life. After one becomes a Christian, Paul says, "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Cor. 6:19, 20.) Many are not willing to let Christ completely control their life in all things. Gradually the desire to please self crowds Christ out of life, and self becomes Lord. (See Rev. 3:14-20.) In Luke 8:14 Jesus said, "And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection." Many may never intend to let their work or interest in things of this world interfere with their service to God, but it can happen.

Another reason that people fall away is by being influenced by false teachings. The New Testament contains numerous warnings about false teachings. In Rom. 16:18 Paul spoke of some, saying that they "by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." The Galatians

had been deceived by false teachers (Gal. 3:1), and as a result they had fallen from grace (Gal. 1:6; 5:4). We are encouraged to study God's word (2 Tim. 2:15), and to continue in it (1 Tim. 4:16). Once we have received Christ, Paul says that we are to be "Rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." (Col. 2:7.) Many have listened to the wisdom and reasoning of men rather than to God, and have been led away from Christ.

Sometimes family pressures may be the cause for one falling away. Jesus warned that those of one's own household may become his foe when he tries to live for Christ (Matt. 10:34-39). Many young Christians have married non-Christians, and because of the continual nagging, and pulling away from the church, eventually the Christian yields and finally falls away from the Lord.

Sometimes problems within the church may cause one to fall away. The church is made up of human beings, it is only natural that it have human problems. Why should one let the weaknesses and faults of others cause him to forfeit his soul to Satan?

Whatever the causes may be, whether attraction to this world, influence of false teachings, family pressures, or the faults of others, we can and we must rise above these. Jesus has promised us help. May we determine to become steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labour is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Cor. 15:58.) Nothing is worth losing your soul for.

If you have fallen away, won't you come back. John told Christians, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9.) James wrote, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (James 5:16.) Don't wait! Don't give sin a chance to harden your heart.

has ordained a way, there is no other way acceptable. May we learn from this lesson in the life of Naaman. There is only one who can save us, and he has but one way to save us. May we learn to do as he instructed, "Search the scriptures."

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