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WHERE OUR WEAKNESS LIES

THE present world situation, both in so-called Christian lands and in what is termed the Mission Field, is profoundly influencing the thoughts of Christian men and women. The world is passing through a period of great crisis. Foundations have been shaken, old standards and values are being discarded as inadequate, moral standards have been lowered. Rationalism, materialism and unbelief are boldly aggressive, challenging the Church even from within. Forces are being discovered which God created for good but which Godless man is incapable of restraining. In the midst of it all, fear grips the hearts of men. A way of salvation — of material prosperity, security and peace — is sought, but man seeks it in his own way and turns still more resolutely from God. As one Tower of Babel collapses, he sets out to build another

This situation has not developed suddenly. It is the result of great movements that have been manifesting themselves among men and nations and gathering momentum, particularly during the last three decades. Unmistakably, it is the development which prophecy has caused us to expect as the preparation for the appearance of the Man of Sin

As is to be expected, the rapidly changing conditions are seriously affecting the work of the Church. In most 'mission' lands there is a state of flux and ferment

that is crystallizing into situations that present an entirely new set of problems, much more complex, much more difficult and fraught with great dangers. Modern civilization is advancing apace. Nationalism is steadily growing and manifesting an increasingly exclusive and militant spirit. In so-called Christian lands also the situation has changed – so much so that they must be recognised definitely now as mission fields urgently needing to be evangelised.

Under the stress and strain of these conditions the Church throughout the world is being tested and proved as perhaps it has not been since the days of fiery persecution in the Early Church. From the early trial it emerged triumphant. In spite of its weakness at that time, its material poverty, the fact that few of the learned and powerful were among its members, its defencelessness and the blood that flowed, there was manifested a spiritual power that neither Satan nor man could conquer or restrain.

To what extent is the modern Church and modern methods of church planting standing the strain that is now bearing with ever increasing force upon them? Can we say, All's well with the Church: the gates of Hell are not prevailing against it?

It is instructive to take stock of the present progress of the Church's witness. Looking beyond local successes and leaving aside enthusiastic reports and optimistic prophecies, let us consider the facts as they are. Although, undoubtedly, there has been reason for encouragement at times and in some regions (for the Gospel is still the power of God unto salvation) on the whole the results have been far from satisfactory. They ought to have been much greater. We have a right, considering the teaching of God's Word and the recorded experiences of the Early Church, to expect much greater progress and the manifestation of much greater power. The history of modern missions shows nothing that can compare with the world-wide conquests of a very much smaller group of labourers during the first century of the Church.

No matter how full of faith and optimism our missionary vision may be, we face the fact that, at our present rate of progress, there is no hope of the world ever being evangelised. It is estimated that not two percent of the world's population today are believing Christians. Of the 2,000,000,000 persons in the world, 1,500,000,000 are without the Gospel. Not only so, but the proportion of heathenism, instead of showing any decrease; is steadily increasing against us. Whole nations are closed to the Gospel. In not a few others, increasingly powerful forces are determinedly seeking its exclusion. Vast regions in Asia, Africa and South America are, in great part, still unevangelised. Even in the older mission fields with the largest number of missionaries, the truth is that not

much more than a beginning has been made. In all these fields the percentage of Christians is exceedingly small. The towns and villages in which churches are to be found are startlingly few compared with the vastly greater number in which there is no church.

Besides purely heathen lands, there are the Roman Catholic countries, where the great majority of the people are ignorant of the true Gospel. It is estimated that in Europe there are 400,000,000 unevangelised people. Nor does the situation in Protestant lands give any cause for satisfaction. The number of people who never attend a church of any kind is far greater than that of churchgoers. In America it is estimated that 70,000,000 are not even nominally connected with any faith of any kind. And if we divide the churchgoers into those who are true believers and those who are merely nominal Christians, we get a much smaller number still. A study of Protestant Church membership in America revealed that 30 per cent never attend church services, 90 per cent never engage in any soul winning activity, not 20 per cent attend prayer meeting — and the prayer meeting in most cases is a misnomer, for preaching has taken the place of prayer.

In addition to all this, we must face the facts regarding the lack of living faith and spiritual power, the unsoundness in doctrine and the dead formalism that have become widespread in the churches. The Protestant communions as a whole show little growth in membership. Startling evidence of the ineffectiveness of modern Protestantism is provided by the Protestant communities in France and Belgium. During the past hundred years their numbers have been steadily, even rapidly, decreasing.

To shut one's eyes to the real facts of the situation in either the 'Homelands' or the 'Mission Field', and to refuse to admit frankly the existence of weakness, failure and danger is not an evidence of faith; it only plays into the hands of the enemy. Resignation under such circumstances is not an evidence of true Christian patience and faithfulness. Pious wishful-thinking is not the fruit of true spiritual-mindedness. In God's dealings with men as seen in Scripture, He never told His Prophets to say all was well when all was not well. Those who did so were condemned as unfaithful prophets, prophesying smooth things. He always had the plain, unhappy truth declared and nothing hidden. The victory was to those who faced the facts, acknowledged unfaithfulness, obeyed God, believed His Word and challenged the enemy in unwavering faith.

In recent years, many of God's people have been seriously considering these matters and seeking to rediscover the secret of the power and success of the New

Testament Church. The answer has not been hard to find. Rationalism (wrongly called Modernism today: it is modern only in its dress) has robbed many of simple faith. The Church has departed from the foundation laid by the Apostles. Organization and human ability take the place of the Spirit's power, of prayer, of faith and have given us man instead of God, man's work instead of God's work.

We are not working in the way the Apostles and those who followed them worked. We may preach the same Gospel, but our methods of work are not the methods they used. The structure of our Church differs greatly from the structure of theirs. Fundamental spiritual principles have been disregarded. Indeed, so radical has been the departure from the Apostolic model that their methods of working and the pattern of their churches appear to us today as something strange and entirely new.

This change is not a new thing. Its beginnings can be traced back to Apostolic times. In the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles there is ample evidence of the tendency that very soon manifested itself to depart from the simplicity of the spiritual order. The church-planters of that time had to be ever watchful and faithful to resist this tendency. But their successors were not always so faithful and modifications of various kinds soon began to creep in. Only three hundred years later, in the time of the Emperor Constantine, we find the Church transformed with a complete human system of organization patterned after that of the State and of the great heathen religious systems.

The Reformation, when it came in the sixteenth century, accomplished great things and swept away by its purifying fire much of the mountain of rubbish under which the truth had been buried for centuries. Priestcraft and doctrinal error were largely eliminated. Much of the man-made ecclesiastical structure was abandoned. The right of all believers to partake of the symbols of the Lord's death at the Lord's Table was regained. However, the priesthood of all believers was not fully restored. Most of the reformed bodies carried over into Protestantism, in varying degrees, a part of the order and organization that they had been accustomed to and that seemed so essential to the functioning of the Church.

When, early in the nineteenth century, the missionary spirit of the Church revived, New Testament times were very far distant and modern Protestant Denominational systems firmly established. It was natural — well-nigh inevitable — that most of the missionaries, instead of returning to the Early Church model, should follow Denominational policy and practice without

question, simply seeking to establish in the lands to which they had gone replicas of the churches to which they belonged.

The development which has taken place in missionary procedure since then has tended generally to depart further from the simplicity of Apostolic practice. Missions have gone in more and more for costly institutional, educational and social programmes, to the neglect, and, in some cases, almost to the exclusion, of direct evangelism. Increasing emphasis has been placed upon human wisdom, human plans and organization, and correspondingly less upon the wisdom, gifts and power of the Holy Spirit.

As we consider the results of modern evangelism, we find that the Gospel has not lost its power. Wherever it is faithfully preached, the seed sown bears fruit in repentance and true faith. This, we feel, is as evident today as it was in New Testament times. It is not there that the difficulty lies. It is in the individual converts and in the churches that we fail to see now the results obtained by the Early Church missionaries.

In the New Testament Church the evidence of the Holy Spirit's power did not end with the conversion of the individual; that was but the beginning. Generally there followed amongst those who were saved the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit for the government, instruction and expansion of the Church. The power of the Holy Spirit continued to work mightily in and through the newly established churches: a power that could not be quenched from without, expanding, conquering. That is the outstanding feature of the Early Church.

It was the lack of this power in the churches established today that caused us to seek the reason for it and to study the New Testament principles and methods of church-planting. We saw in the converts won and in the churches formed a distinct lack of the Holy Spirit's power, resulting in weakness and dependence. Some believers lived consistent Christian lives and a few learned to give acceptable Gospel messages, but they seemed never to be able to get much beyond that point. They continued to be dependent upon the missionary or pastor; the spiritual gifts necessary for the government of the church and for teaching were lacking. Speaking generally, there was also a lack of an impelling evangelistic vision. A church would soon settle, down to live to itself and become dulled to the sense of the need of the perishing multitudes around it. We were forced to admit that our churches were inferior at every point to those established in the Early Church days and to ask the question, Where is now that irresistible, dynamic power that overcame every obstacle, and that zeal which made every convert a witness and every congregation a centre for world

evangelism? And where the gifts of the Spirit that equipped men to be preachers and Elders and Deacons and Teachers and Evangelists, so that the first church-planters were able to move on from place to place for the establishing of new congregations?

The power of the Holy Spirit to bring men to Christ is still with us. Revivals and even mass movements in the mission field, when thousands acknowledge Christ, continue to occur. But what follows such evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence and power? Unfortunately, it is then that our modern method departs from the New Testament order. Instead of expecting the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit among those who are saved and allowing freedom for their exercise, and forming the congregations according to the simple, spiritual order of the New Testament Church, our cumbersome, modern ecclesiastical machinery is set up, too slow moving to cope with the situation, restricting the preaching of the Gospel to a chosen few (and thus effectively closing the mouths of a multitude of witnesses) moulding inexorably to its own pattern, reducing to its own speed, until the liberty, spontaneity and power of the Holy Spirit, the Originator of the movement, has been effectively stifled.

The history of evangelism in Great Britain and America provides examples as staking as any to be found in foreign fields. We have but to consider the relative simplicity of Methodism in its early days of revival and power, and of the Baptists when they first spread throughout the length and breadth of the United States. In both of these movements comparatively few limitations were placed upon the freedom of the Holy Spirit. At least He was permitted to use whom He would. Not many barriers of organization restricted His activity in the congregations. Anyone with the gift of the Spirit to preach, not only was permitted to preach, but was expected and urged to do so. The distinction between clergy and laity had not yet crystallized or was in abeyance.

In such movements we witness a break-away from the accepted order. The Holy Spirit had been bound and the Church lifeless and static, but He finds instruments He can use, the trammels of organization and formalism are thrown aside and there breaks forth again the true fire that burned in the New Testament Church when He manifested His gifts through all the members. Even what we may call the by-products of these movements — the consequent moral reformation in social and political spheres and the general quickening of the consciences of nations — have been tremendous in their significance, influencing generations and affecting the history of the world.

But the same reactionary influences soon reappeared. Man in his wisdom, fearing to continue to put confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit, felt he must take these movements in hand, organizing them to bring them into the realm of the humanly practicable and understandable and to give them, as he thought, efficiency, stability, permanency and respectability. Spiritual power was sought in eloquence, education, music and programmes. A superstructure of ecclesiastical organization was erected, largely silencing the laity' and quenching the Holy Spirit. The Church again became static, its power but a weak, struggling thing, its light but a glimmer.

Today we have highly organized, modern Denominations, with culture, wealth and beautiful buildings, striving year after year with all the human might they command to produce a little fruit. Faced with a world well-nigh in chaos, the power of the organized Church is inadequate and its message unconvincing. Men are turning away from the formal, respectable, comfortable but Cross-less and power-less religion it offers. They want strength and wisdom beyond their own; a sure word, a sure foundation, reality. They seek it elsewhere — in false cults, political ideologies, catch-words. They need Christ; but He is straitened in His people. They need the living God; but the Church gives them man.

A wave of materialism and Godlessness has swept over 'Christian' lands. A missionary on furlough writes, "One gets the impression that this is a land on the way back to heathenism." Bishop C. M. Chavasse says:

Today we confront a new phenomenon — a generation that has lost God and a whole dimension of life: the spiritual dimension. Half our countrymen are worse than heathen in that they believe in nothing — not even themselves.

Is it not high time that we turn to God's Word to see where we have erred,, to return to the way of power, to withdraw the hand of man from the Spirit's work, to exercise faith again and permit the Builder of the Church to build with His power according to the pattern He has revealed, that His glory 'may once more fill His Church?

During world-war years when formal religion was valueless, the weakness of the Organized Church became increasingly evident. It was not the Lord or the Word of God that failed in those days. In Him and in His Word alone men found strength and comfort. And many of those who passed through the fire say, 'Let us seek the way back to the simplicity of the New Testament Church that gave men Christ in the fulness of His life and power'.

God will yet speak and men shall hear. Against the Church which the Lord builds, the gates of hell shall not prevail. Today they are prevailing because there is much that is not of His building. But Christ did not give us the assurance of His Church's triumph as a pious hope that really Could not be fulfilled. We are responsible to take His Word by faith and to walk in unwavering obedience that the mighty power of "the Son of the Living God" may be seen once more bringing healing, light and life to this needy world for which He died and to which He would speak in its darkness, suffering, Godlessness and despair.

Taken from, "The New Testament Order for Church and Missionary, by Alexander Rattray Hay, General Superintendent New Testament Missionary Union. From the second edition, revised and enlarged (Buenos Aires, 1947.)

The Believer's Authority in Christ

A servant of the Lord was called upon to minister help in a situation that was hopeless beyond all human recourse. Driven to God in desperation, His servant boldly claimed in prayer the fulfilment of certain promises that had a direct bearing upon the case. God answered, fulfilled His promises, the seemingly impossible was done, Satan was rebuked, lives were saved from disaster and God's name was glorified.

Does the believer have authority to claim from God the thing which he asks of Him in prayer? May he take the position of definitely resisting Satan by faith? God's Word says that he not only may but should do both of these. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith" (1 Pet. 5:8). "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

However, we should know the ground upon which this privilege is given and the conditions that govern it, that we fall not into the sin of presumption.

In the first place, we must realize that the authority is not ours but Christ's. It is only when we truly speak or pray in His Name, expressing His will, that our words have His authority behind them. We are given no right to demand what we wish or think should be. The promise is only to those who ask according to His will.

The authority which our Lord possesses is generally recognized, at least theoretically, by spiritual believers. He is "Lord of lords and King of kings"; He is seated "at the right hand of the Majesty on high"; all things have been put under His feet (Heb. 1:3; Eph. 1:21, 22; 1 Pet. 3:22). While He was on earth He gave us a glimpse of His authority when sickness, the wind and waves, demons, and death itself obeyed His command. The authority of the risen Lord is absolute beyond the comprehension of our finite mind.

We, the members of the Church, are seated in Christ, the Head of the Church, in heavenly places (Eph. 1:19-23; 2:6). "In Him" we participate in all His wisdom, power and authority. But let us understand that this participation is only "in Him". The victory is His, not ours; won by Him, not by us. In us there is no wisdom, power or authority.

The Lord said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it". Satan has no right to prevail. It is contrary to the Lord's purpose that he do so. To no small extent he is prevailing in the Church today and in many of God's people, but the reason is that God's people are permitting him to do so, even opening the way for him.

Christ is not in defeat; He is absolute Victor. It is necessary to the carrying out of the Lord's purposes that Satan still be permitted a certain degree of liberty, but he cannot do more than Christ permits him to do—or than we permit him to do through lack of faith or obedience.

Though we assent to the doctrine of God's omnipotence, we are very apt to feel helpless when we see the evidence of Satan's power. That attitude is unbelief and inevitably bears the fruit of unbelief. In the conflict against Satan, we shall accomplish nothing if we doubt God's power to fulfil His Word and carry out His will.

When we know what God's will is, it is certain that Satan will challenge us to the utmost of his power. He will seek to turn us aside by every kind of argument and to discourage and frighten us that our faith may fail. God permits Satan to test us for our good, but it is not His will that we settle down to accept as inevitable a condition of partial defeat. Patience and longsuffering are true Christian virtues, possible only through the indwelling grace of the Lord, but to bow our heads meekly to endure the triumph of Satan, through unbelief or spiritual inertia, is not Christian patience and longsuffering. Paul showed much patience and longsuffering in the face of Satan's fierce and continual efforts to

prevent God's purpose being carried out through him; but he never accepted defeat.

"Command Ye Me"

When we know God's will, it is necessary that we have faith that it be carried out through us. God said to His people, "Command ye Me concerning the work of Mine hands". He desires that we go to Him in the prayer of absolute faith asking that His will be done. If we are uncertain as to His faithfulness or power, then, "Let not that man think that he will receive anything of the Lord".

It is only concerning the work of His hands that we are to command Him—concerning that which He is doing; that which is His purpose, and which neither Satan nor man has a right to hinder. It is not concerning that which we consider we are doing for Him, but only concerning that which He wills to do through us.

There are occasions—and they are very many—when we must definitely challenge Satan with God's Word and accept no compromise. We have the right to avail ourselves of Christ's power and authority over Satan. When Satan attacks we have the right to take our stand upon God's Word, claiming by faith that it shall be fulfilled and Satan's work completely overthrown. We have seen many a seemingly hopeless situation entirely changed when we have taken such a stand. Until we did so Satan pressed his attacks with confidence, but immediately we challenged him openly and definitely in the Name of Christ, the Victor of Calvary, his defeat and powerlessness became evident.

However, we would repeat again, we should realize clearly that no power is conferred upon us wherewith we are able to resist him. The Word of God is not a talisman or a magic formula that may be employed at will either to protect us from Satan's evil power or to make God do what we ask. God alone has power to subdue the arch-enemy. Let us not forget that the archangel Gabriel durst not bring a railing accusation against him but said, "The Lord rebuke thee" (Jude 8-10).

Satan cannot stand for one moment against God. Such is the power and authority of God that His Word alone is sufficient to reduce Satan to silence and to put him to flight. It was with the Word of God that Christ met him and before it Satan became speechless and powerless. Christ used God's Word with truth and

with faith. He simply stated what God said, facing Satan with that which God had made known as His purpose.

Dangers in the Way

Two great dangers are that our faith may be weak so that we fail to seek the carrying out of God's full will, asking only a part, or that we mistake His will and lay claim to that which is not in His purpose. Let us be before Him for the faith that we need and that He needs to find in us. Also, let us be watchful that our wills be yielded: that we be always ready to have Him cause us to see that what we had thought was His will and had insisted upon was only our own thought. We have found this very necessary.

When Paul had the "thorn in the flesh" that he recognized as Satan's work he asked God to remove it. Paul had faith and he had a right to lay claim to Christ's victory over Satan. But God did not grant his request. Was God unfaithful to fulfil His Word? No, the thorn in the flesh was necessary to the accomplishing of His purpose in Paul.

Paul had not asked according to God's will; but he had a yielded will, so when God caused him to see that there was a deeper principle involved in the matter than what he had first discerned, he thanked God and rejoiced that the thorn was permitted to remain.

If we are truly willing to know and to do God's will, He will lead us step by step with infinite patience until we do know it and then, when we seek that of Him in the prayer of faith, He will be faithful to bring it to pass. It is His will that we participate fully in Christ's power and triumph, first in our own hearts and lives, and then in that work of His hands which He would carry out through us.

<u>SOULISH PRAYER</u>	<u>PRAYER IN THE SPIRIT</u>
<u>INFLUENCED BY :</u>	<u>IN THIS:</u>
(1) The Heart—what we love or do not like .	(1) The Heart gives perfect love to God and likes what He likes.
(a) The Mind —what we think wise, best, important, necessary.	(2) The Mind is given revelation through the Word and the Spirit to know the mind of Christ.
(3) The Will — what we want or do not want.	(3) The Will is yielded to God and wills to do His will.
Such prayer is not true prayer. It is not in accordance with God's wisdom and will. It will not be heard or answered.	This prayer will be offered by one who is walking with the Lord. It will be in

Berea Teaching Centre in Macedonia



Text: Acts 17: 10-12

“And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable woman which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.”

The city of Berea in Macedonia (Northern Greece) some forty-five miles west of Thessalonica, was visited by Paul and Silas on his first missionary journey. Before coming to Berea, Paul and Silas had laid the foundation of a thriving church in Thessalonica in a short time. However, due to the unbelieving Jews, persecution arose against them to such an extent that they had to leave the newly

founded congregation, and came to the city of Berea. The Holy Spirit, who inspired Luke to write the book of Acts, recorded for us some key lessons we can learn from the Bereans. These lessons have to do with our attitude toward God's word and his ministers; our discipline in the reading of God's word; our willingness to acknowledge the truth when shown from the word of God; our willingness to be a discerning Christian, and our willingness to share the truth of God with others in order that they might be saved. So the question we need to ask ourselves is; how can I become a Christian like the Bereans? That is: What can I glean from this account of the Bereans that clearly demonstrates the mark a true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ? There would be less deception in the church if everyone who names the name of Christ would become Christians like the Bereans of those days. There would be more converts to the faith if more people would examine the claims of the Holy Bible with an open heart.

Acts 17:10, 13; 20:4

Wherever the truths of the Gospel are proclaimed, those who honestly desire to do right are led to a diligent searching of the Scriptures. If, in the closing scenes of this earth's history, those to whom testing truths are proclaimed would follow the example of the Bereans, searching the Scriptures daily, and comparing with God's Word the messages brought them, there would today be a large number loyal to the precepts of God's law, where now there comparatively few. But when the unpopular Bible truths are presented, many refuse to make this investigation. Though unable to controvert the plain teachings of the Holy Scripture, they yet manifest the utmost reluctance to study the evidences offered. Some assume that even if these doctrines are indeed true, it matters little whether or not they accept the new light, and they cling to pleasing fables which the enemy uses to lead souls astray. So are their minds blinded by error, and they become separated from heaven.

The city of Berea (modern Veria) was founded in the Archaic Period in the south-western part of Macedonia, some 73 km west of Thessalonica. Ruins extend to 700 BCE (though scarce), when the city probably began as an agricultural market centre. The founders were no doubt Thracians and Phrygians driven out by the "Makadne" in one of the Archaic transitions. The mythological beginning of the city is ascribed to a daughter of Ocean, the Titan that married Thetys (another Titan) and bore the "Oceanids" (Nymphs of the great rivers). The myth probably recalls the main reason the city was founded on this location. The city is set on a ridge with the well-watered nearby basins of the Eliakomon and Axios Rivers. The alluvial plains north of Mount Vermio were (and still are) still rich in apple, peach and pear orchards. Scholars believe the city may have reached 60,000 to 70,000 people at its zenith (about twice its modern

population), but this is speculation. A major electric dam on the Eliakomon River today provides industrial sector work today, and the area is still considered reasonably wealthy.

Extensive excavations have not been attempted in the area. The major artifacts in the local museum, though quite interesting, are mainly funerary monuments. A few sections of the ancient city wall are displayed on the edges of the city. With few physical finds, scholars are left to seek information from ancient historians. Thucydides (the Classical period general that was expelled from Athens after losing to the Persians) referred to the place. The city opened their gates to Rome after the Battle of Pydna (168 BCE) and was taken by the Romans without resistance. Under the Roman administration, the city became well populated, partly due to the extension of the Egnatian Way through the region of Berea to its north.

Long after Paul's preaching the Christian community thrived in the city. One tradition says that Sopater, son of Pyrrhus, was the first convert of the Berean church (mentioned in Acts 20:4). The other (better established) tradition is that of the "Synaxar" (Orthodox Calendar of the Saints) that refers to Karpus (one of the 70 Disciples) as first Bishop of the city. Much later, the Middle Ages brought great prosperity to the region. Indeed, the city was considered one of the most important in the region, with several beautiful churches including frescoes as old as the 12th CE. More than 37 churches of the period have been identified, but scholars believe more than 100 churches existed in the period!

Paul fled in the night from Thessalonica to Berea (Acts 17:10) and taught in the synagogue there (during the Second Mission Journey). In the synagogue he found people who were eager to receive the Gospel and compare it with the Hebrew Scriptures. The search of the Scriptures daily became an example to early Christians, and the name was carried to later churches everywhere. Luke notes that many believed, and includes that "honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few" (Acts 17:12) came to Jesus. The reception was probably a true respite to the Apostle and his team, but it was short-lived. Jews that did not believe the message of Jesus preached by Paul came from Thessalonica when they learned Paul continued ministry there. They came and stirred up the people against Paul, causing him to once again flee, this time to Athens. Paul left Silas and Timothy to care for the believers in Berea and in Thessalonica for a short while.

In the modern city stands a "Triptych monument" stands in reminder of Paul's work. The monument includes three steps that were removed from a salvage dig at a nearby school property. The steps were reputed to have been from the

location of the ancient synagogue. The display is made of colourful mosaic tile and displays three panels: 1) The Macedonian man vision; 2) Paul; 3) The address to the Bereans.

Characteristics of a Christian as from Berean

I. Receive the word of God with all readiness of mind.

Readiness of mind in the Greek is *prothumia* that is, *zeal, earnest, alacrity*. If we choose to be a real Christian, we must approach the Word of God in the correct attitude of heart. We should approach the Bible with a ready mind to understand what says the scriptures, and pray that God the Holy Spirit would grant us understanding of the Word of God. In I John 2:20 it says that we have an *unction*, and in verse twenty-seven it says we have an *anointing*; these are translated from the same Greek word meaning, *special endowment*. Jesus said that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. The Bereans didn't turn Paul and Silas away, but received them and were eager to hear them concerning the Gospel. We too must be eager to hear the Word of God, and to put it into practice. When we meet in House Churches, we should expect to hear the Word of the Lord preached. We should desire and hunger for the sincere milk of the word, and the meat of the word to grow thereby. We should always let the word of God be true, and every man (including ourselves) become the liars.

II. We must search the Scriptures if we are to be true Christians.

If we choose to be a Christian like the Bereans, we must be dedicated students of the Holy Scriptures. We must recognise that the source of the truth is the Word of God and the Word of God alone. And as students of the Word, we must try by the Word whether the things preached and taught are accordingly true. Notice how the Bereans did not except what Paul and Silas preached because they were great preachers or well-known. In John's gospel chapter five verse thirty-nine we read, "*Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.*"

If we choose to be true Christians we must subject all that is taught or spoken to the authority of God's Holy Word. The Christian must not establish truth on what he senses on the emotional level, or on his personal opinions but strictly on the bases of the scriptures. The preacher should demand that his hearers make recourse to the Word of God to make sure that what was preached, or taught is correct. Christians are

suspicious of any minister that discourages questions, and simply demands blind obedience. No where in the Bible are we taught that we are to blindly follow anyone; this would include the minister. In Isaiah 8:20 it says, *“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”*

The faith in Christ is a rational faith, and a faith that can stand the test of intellectual scrutiny. We do not have to dump our brains and become brutes to believe the Scriptures as some in the scientific world imagine. The Lord Jesus himself commanded that the scriptures be searched. This shows us that God is interested in a thoughtful consideration of the truths advanced in the scripture. Unlike that of cults and false religions, true servants of the Lord encourage the asking of questions on the part of the hearer. An unexamined faith is not worth anyone’s commitment. Truth is not afraid of being examined because truth will always prove to be the truth every time.

III. The Word of God is for every Christian, daily bread.

The passage in Acts seventeen verse eleven says that they searched the Scripture daily. If we choose to be Christians, we must read the Word of God every day we possibly can. Some days will naturally bring exceptions, but hopefully these are rare exceptions. The prophet Jeremiah in the fifteenth chapter verse sixteen said, *“Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and the rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of host.”* If we choose to be Christians like the Bereans, we must eat, or rather, internalise the Word of God. When we take the Word of God to heart, we are obedient to its commands. Psalms 119:11 says, *“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”* In Psalms chapter one, the writer speaks of the blessing of those who stand not in the counsel of the ungodly, but finds his delight in the law of the Lord, and in it, meditates day and night. *“. . . It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”* (Matthew 4:4).

IV. A true Christian is a discerning believer.

Just as the Bereans searched the Scriptures to try what was being preached of Paul and Silas, we too must have a heart of discernment; especially since these are the last days. In the book of Hebrews chapter five verse fourteen, we read, *“But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”* In the first general Epistle of John we are commanded in chapter four verse one: *“Beloved, believe not every spirit,*

but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” This is why it is so important that we all become genuine Christians. There is great danger of being deceived and lead astray into destruction. The Bible warns us that Satan transforms himself into a messenger of light, and therefore it is no marvel that his ministers appear as ministers of righteousness. Satan has ministers in the Church today who preach another Jesus, another Gospel, by the power of another spirit. Exercising good discernment was one of the things Jesus commended the Church of Ephesus for. They tried them that called themselves apostles, and found them to be liars. The discernment of a true Christian depends solely on “it is written” and not on signs, wonders, and miracles. Miracles are no sure way of discerning whether some one is of God or not.

V. The true Christian is concerned about sin.

Notice in verse twelve of our text: *“Therefore many of them believed. . .”* that is, they repented of their sins when they were called to salvation. If we choose to be true believers in Jesus Christ, we must be concern about sin. The concern should begin with us; we need a clear revelation of ourselves. Why is it that some of us are so good at detecting the mote that is our brother’s eye, and yet we seem so oblivious to the beam in our own eye? I am convinced that this is why some people will never change; they are so blind to their own need and therefore do not see the need for change. As a Christian, we must be willing to forgive others their trespasses against us or our sins will not be forgiven by God. We should be willing to forgive even if the offender asks for no forgiveness. Just because the offender refuses to acknowledge their offense doesn’t give us a Scriptural right to hold bitterness, and unforgiveness against that person, especially a brother or a sister in the Lord. Who are we to think that we are right in such an attitude of heart? If the Lord God chooses not to forgive that one thing; he has never sinned and needed forgiveness, but we have all sinned against the Lord and if we have been pardoned, we really don’t have a right to hold out unforgiveness to others. This kind of attitude grieves the Holy Spirit and causes the call and purposes of God in the life to come to a grinding halt. If the offending party refuses to acknowledge their guilt in the offense, God knows how to deal with such a one as this, so don’t think that it is forgotten, or looked over by God. Remember, blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.

VI. The Christian is jealous for the Word of God.

This is something that seems to be lacking in all the churches today. It is difficult to find those who care about what “thus saith the Lord.” It would

seem that most believers are more jealous for their denominations than for the things of God. We live in a day where the precious Word of God can be butchered, perverted, twisted, and completely ignored. It would seem that God's people love to have it so. But any true Christian who desires to be a Berean Christian will contend for the faith that was once delivered to the saints. In the book of St. Jude verse three, we read, "*Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*" (Jude 3).

It isn't enough for Christians to give a positive presentation of the Gospel; but a bold, authoritative defence for the faith. This means we must falsify all other "ways" and point men to the only way; the only truth; the only life which is Christ Jesus our Lord. Not only does Jude admonish us to contend for the faith, but also the apostle Peter. In his first epistle, Peter wrote in the third chapter; "*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*"

The word *answer* in verse fifteen of chapter three means, *a defence*. There is a great need for us to rise to the accusation of the times and the seasons; in the midst of many so-called gods and goddess, gurus, swamis, and ascended masters, there is a great need for the Constitutional Church of the Lord Jesus to oppose heresies while at the same time preaching and teaching Jesus Christ. The message of the Biblical Christian is Jesus Christ and him crucified, and that there is no other way, and no other hope.

VII. The Christian is willing to suffer for the faith.

This is also seldom realised in the Constitutional Church of Jesus Christ in the Western World and particularly in Europe and America. We seem to think that the persecution of Christians died out with the Roman Coliseum. But the persecution of the Believers in Christ never really stopped, we do experience today with the I.S. (Islamic State) everywhere in the world. They even kill their own Islamic believers. Indeed, down through the centuries whether the Romans or the Catholic Institution, and later the religion of Islam, Christians many times had to give up their lives for the testimony which they held. This is one of the greatest legacies of our faith and the blood of our brothers and sisters who loved not their lives even unto the death. Should we now betray their sacrifice by compromising the faith for which they suffered and died? And what of our brothers and sisters in our day; in many countries of the world many

are under great trial? In every Muslim country Christians are suffering great persecution such as; imprisonments, torture, decapitation, castration, and deportations. Many Christians around the world are sitting in some cold, filthy prison cell right now, and they are full of joy of the Holy Ghost.

To be a Christian witness is to be a Christian martyr. The word in the Greek for “witness” is the word from which we get, “martyr.” Simply put; a true Christian is always ready to suffer, and if need be, die for the message he or she is preaching to others. The reason for this is because the Christian who suffers realises that he or she is dead already, and his life is hid with Christ in God. This was true of the apostle Paul and Silas who were the ministers that brought the gospel of the grace of God to the Berean citizens of Macedonia Paul having been sent away because of the persecution came to Berea to preach Christ unto them. This is that same Paul who wrote, *“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.”* (Phil. 1:29).

This is one of those precious gifts that we do not hear of from pulpits in America. Paul said, *“For unto you it is given. . .”* that is, it is a gift from God just as much as any other gift we receive from God. Will you become a Berean Christian and receive God’s gift of suffering for Christ sake? *“Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.”* (Acts 14:22). *“So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God, for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer.”* (2 Thess. 1:5).

To suffer for righteousness sake is more glorious than we can know in this life. To be so identified with the Lord Jesus that this world hates you just as it hates Jesus Christ is a wonderful testimony that we are not of the world. If we were of the world the world would love it own; but we are not of the world, but have been called out of the world. *“Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.”* (James 5:10-11).

Most of the persecution that the sincere Christians shall endure will come from the so-called “Church.” Paul writing to his son in the faith concerning how in the last days, *“. . . all they that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer*

persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.” (2 Timothy 3:12-13). For the child of God, there is going to be joy in that blessed morning; in that eternal morning where no tears are shed; where no burdens to bear; where no sorrows to share. All will be bright and fair, when we all meet up there. O, Joy in that morning and beautiful for situation; all because of that precious blood that was shed; the Lamb of God for sinners slain.

Conclusion

These are just a few indicators that we can use to determine if we are like the Bereans as we should be. These are by no means all the characteristics of a sincere Christian, but I hope that this will spark your own study on this subject. The need for discernment is great in our day, and there is every wind of false doctrine blowing throughout the Churches and the World. The only sure foundation that will not be moved in these tempestuous times and seasons is the Holy and Precious Word of God. We are built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. This means that the Word of God is our ultimate authority on all things; especially when it comes to sound doctrine. The Word of God is alive, and energetic; it is dynamic in its working, and sharper than any two-edged sword. If we let it guild us by the Spirit of God, it will reveal to us the will of God and shine the precious light on our path. But it will also pierce to the dividing asunder or soul and spirit, and will even divide the bone from the marrow and expose all the thoughts and intents of the heart. This is the word by which the true gospel is preached unto men.



A few study books the preacher should have on his bookshelves

Thompson Chain-Reference Study Bible

This was my first study Bible I ever bought in London before I entered the Brussels Bible Institute in 1960. A Thompson study Bible will help you in ways other Bibles cannot. It's the unique "Chain-Reference System" that allows you to follow any subject, person, place or idea, from the front of your Bible to the end. Thompson Bible users say it's the best way to study your Bible. No other Bible has this superb, patented, "Chain-Reference System" developed by Dr. Frank C. Thompson in 1890. Since that time, the publisher, Kirkbride Bible Company, has been adding thousands of additional topics and links. The Thompson you buy today has over 100,000 links covering over 7,000 topics. Every page is stuffed with treasure. Your Thompson Study Bible will become a trusted friend.

The Thompson Chain-Reference Bible comes with extras found only in premium study Bibles like gold-foil gilded pages and silk ribbon bookmarks. Your Thompson Bible can also be personalized with your name in gold on the cover. For super-swift researching you can order your Thompson "thumb indexed."

Life Application Study Bible NKJV, by Tyndale House Publishers Staff.

Overview

This best-selling study Bible is now available in the New King James Version. It contains thousands of Life Application Notes to help readers apply the truths of God's Word to everyday life. Includes book introductions, in-text maps and charts, personality profiles, and more.

Features

Words of Jesus featured in red lettering
Dictionary/concordance
Daily reading plan
Blueprint and Megathemes for each book
Topical index
Tyndale House Publishers

Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible-KJV, AMG Publishers, 1-jun.-2008 - 2284 pages

This Bible is beautiful. Excellent quality. I purchased the KJV. I love the notes and Strong's numbers throughout the text. This Bible can stand alone with the Strong's reference in the back and is helpful with my more comprehensive Strong's concordance. The only negative, in my opinion, are the occasional statements "this word or phrase was not in the original Hebrew/Greek". Good example is in Ephesians where the note states that the original text didn't say that the book was addressed to the saints which are at Ephesus. To me, that discredits the text instead of helping me understand it more. However, as previously stated, I really do appreciate this work. True Value. I would highly recommend. From what I've read so far, 99.9% of the notes offer excellent insights and are solid in doctrine.

This is probably the best study Bible out, for many reasons. I bought this Bible (KJV AMG) in early 2013 and read through it in a few months. After I finished it, I put it on my shelf and moved on to other study Bibles. I have many study Bibles, but it is hard to find one that has everything a serious student of the Bible wants when studying God's Word (I will list what I mean at the bottom of this review). So, I often buy different study Bibles to compliment each other because each one usually excels in a few categories, but fails in others. I recently (early 2014) took this Bible off my shelf to compare it to my interlinear Bible, and as I took another look at it, I realized I had purchased a gem of a Bible! This is truly a complete

study Bible with all the necessary study material under one cover; it is truly amazing if you actually use the material it provides you with.

The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, by James Strong, LL.D, S.T.D. (Nelson Reference & Electronic)

The Strong's Exhaustive Concordance is the most complete, easy-to-use, and understandable concordance for studying the original languages of the Bible. Combining the text of the King James Bible with the power of the Greek and Hebrew Lexicons, any student or pastor can gain a clear understanding of the Word to enrich their study.

Due to the helpful nature of the Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, we have incorporated this tool into our Online Study Bible search engine, enhancing it's usefulness.

You can access Strong's Concordance by searching in the search box below and choosing the King James Version or New American Standard Bible. Once you are within a Bible reference, check the "Strongs Numbers" at the top right of your reading pane to view the Hebrew and Greek lexicons using Strong's Concordance numbers.

You can also browse through Strong's concordance numbers by navigating to the King James Version translation or New American Standard Bible translation and checking "Strongs Numbers".

New Bible Commentary, Consulting Editors: D.A. Carson, R.T. France, J.A. Motyer & G.J. Wenham (Reference Collection).

A completely new edition of this well-established one-volume commentary on the whole Bible from a team of international contributors. Based on the New International Version. New features include a wide range of maps, diagrams and further-reading lists. Hardcover 1455 Pages

Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, Complete and Unabridged.(Hendrikson Publishers).

Matthew Henry (1662–1714) has been known and loved for three centuries for his devotional commentary on the Bible. It has not been generally known that he was also a distinguished preacher. He began preaching at twenty-four years old and held pastorates until his death. The

greatness of his sermons consists in their scriptural content, lucid presentation, practical application, and Christ-centeredness.

This is the only complete and unabridged one-volume edition of Matthew Henry's famous work.

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“First among the mighty (commentaries) for general usefulness we are bound to mention the man whose name is a household word, Matthew Henry. He is the most pious and pithy, sound and sensible, suggestive and sober, terse and trustworthy . . . he is deeply spiritual, heavenly, profitable; finding good matter in every text, and from all deducting the most practical and judicious lessons . . . It is the Christian's companion, suitable to everybody, instructive to all.” (Charles H. Spurgeon).

From Genesis to Revelation, Matthew Henry successfully combines practical application, devotional insight, and scholarship on the entire Bible. Henry has profound insights on the content, message and nature of God's divine revelation. Perfect for all readers of the Bible who want a convenient, comprehensive commentary.

Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament, by W.E. Vine. Old Testament edited by F.F. Bruce. (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, U.S.A)

This convenient one volume combines Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words and Unger and White's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament. This book allows you to easily access the alphabetized English equivalents of the Greek or Hebrew words from which they are translated. Throughout the text the most significant biblical words are illustrated by Scripture passages, comments, cross-references, ancient and modern meanings, precise etymologies, historical notes, and clearly defined technical information. Each original language is indexed, and the addition of a topical index allows you to access all the dictionary entries pertinent to specific New Testament ideas and teachings. Keyed to Strong's.

The Zondervan "Parallel New Testament in Greek and English, the interlinear Greek-English New Testament (NIV and KJV).

The NIV Greek and English New Testament is a parallel Bible, with the Greek New Testament on the left-hand page (using the text that underlies the NIV 2011) and the NIV 2011 on the right-hand page. The Greek text includes footnotes that relate to other Greek New Testaments, and the NIV has the footnotes readers have come to expect and rely on. Section headings are identical in both editions for easy reference. Additional features of the NIV Greek and English New Testament include: Side-by-side format (Greek text on one page with NIV on the facing page) Greek text formatted to match the NIV text Single column format Words of Christ in black Presentation page Ribbon marker (leather edition only) Maps

Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, by Gleason L. Archer (Regency Reference Library, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

(Surfing on Internet, I saw that the book can be downloaded.)

Clear, scholarly answers to apparent discrepancies in the Bible, confirming that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. Over the centuries and still at the present time, Christians—from scholars and students to people in the pew—have been troubled by vexing questions and apparent contradictions in the Bible. In this encyclopedia of Bible difficulties, Dr. Gleason Archer offers carefully thought-out arguments for the unity and integrity of the Bible that should convince the skeptic and reassure the person who may be confused by the seeming discrepancies in Scripture. Dr. Archer's answers are sometimes simple insights that seem afterward to have been obvious all along. But more often his answers are based on a careful study of the meaning of words, the cultural context of Bible eras, knowledge of the Hebrew numbering system, and many other details not readily known to the average Bible reader.

New Dictionary of Theology, Editors: Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and Consulting editor: J.L.Packer. (IVP)

Since its publication, the *New Dictionary of Theology* has rapidly established itself as a standard, authoritative reference work in systematic and historical theology. More than 630 articles cover a variety of theological themes, thinkers and movements: From creation to the millennium; from Abelard to Zwingli; from Third World liberation theology to South African Dutch Reformed theology. Firmly anchored in the evangelical tradition, the *NDOT* is nevertheless wide-ranging in its scope. Over 200 contributors, experts in their individual fields, offer both

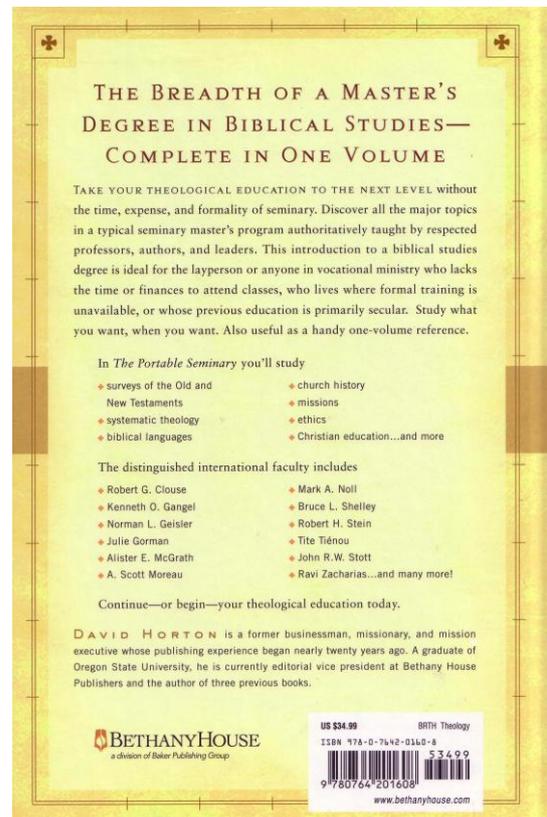
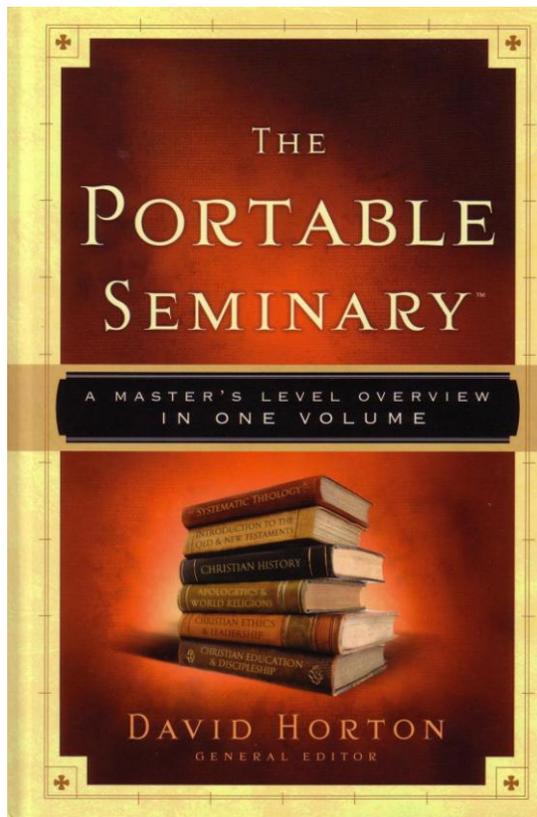
Western and international perspective. Concise and comprehensive, biblically grounded and historically informed, even-handed and free from unduly technical language, this dictionary has been praised by general readers, pastors and scholars.

New Dictionary of Theology

- **Editors:** Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright
- **Consulting Editor:** J. I. Packer
- **Publisher:** InterVarsity Press (1988)

[Our Bible Studies on Internet](#)

We are looking around for a new website entirely of our own.



Recommended

Read the Bible Online

In English

King James Version (Public Domain Version)

<http://www.allonlinebible.com/>

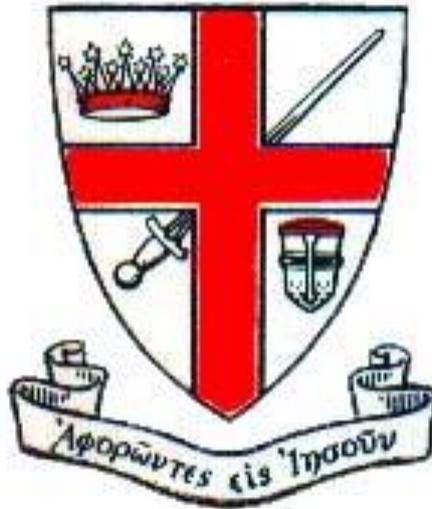
In Dutch

<http://www.online-bijbel.nl/>

In French

Version Louis Segond (Normalement Domaine Publique)

<http://www.christianevents.mu/lire-bible-francais-louis-segond.html>



“Look unto Jesus”

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