

When We Come To Ourselves

Working Out Our Own Salvation

Martin G. Collins

Given 28-Feb-09; Sermon #925

The mention of Presidents, and the morality of Presidents, and how it has declined, is an interesting subject. As you go back, sometimes you found more righteous Presidents, than others.

Here is a quote from Woodrow Wilson, the 28th President of the United States. He was the son and grandson of Presbyterian ministers. While growing up, the influence of the Bible was prevalent in his life. Sometimes a President will say something that is valuable, and in this case, Mr. Wilson certainly did. I would like you to focus on one phrase that he uses, and that is, "he comes to himself."

It is a very wholesome and regenerating change, which a man undergoes when he 'comes to himself.'...It is a process of disillusionment. The scales have fallen away. He sees himself soberly, and knows under what conditions his powers must act, as well as what his powers are. He has got rid of earlier prepossessions about the world of men and affairs, both those which were too favorable and those which were too unfavorable...There is no fixed time in a man's life at which he comes to himself, and some men never come to themselves at all. It is a change reserved for the thoroughly sane and healthy, and for those who can detach themselves from tasks and drudgery long and often enough to get, at any rate once and again, a view of the proportions of life and of the stage and plot of its action...Christianity gave us, in the fullness of time, the perfect image of right living, the secret of social and of individual well-being; for the two are not separable, and the man who receives and verifies that secret in his own living has discovered not only the best and only way to serve the world, but also the one happy way to satisfy himself. Then, indeed, has he come to himself.

So, we have President Wilson's definition of "when a man comes to himself." There comes a time, in every Christian's life, when he (or she) must come to himself, when he must deeply understand his relationship to his Creator, and to his fellowman. There also come multiple lesser times, in every Christian's life, when he must realize that God wants him to do something, and that something more is expected of him.

In Acts 12, we have an account of Peter's deliverance out of prison, by which the intent

When We Come to Ourselves by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

of Herod against him was defeated, and his life preserved for further service to God, and the church.

Luke authored the Acts of the Apostles, and in verse 5, he emphasizes constant or earnest prayer, to show that every step in building the church is due to God's blessing, and supernatural intervention.

Acts 12:5-12 Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" And his chains fell off his hands. Then the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and tie on your sandal"; and so he did. And he said to him, "Put on your garment and follow me." So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. And when Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people." So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.

This is truly an amazing account of the physical salvation, in one sense, of Peter from the prison and from the wrath of Herod and the Jewish people. The angel woke him up in his cell, caused his chains and shackles to fall off, ushered him past the two guard posts, supernaturally opened the great iron gate, and guided him out of the stronghold, and down the street. Peter was dazed standing in the street, and then the angel suddenly left him there.

Let us consider that last phrase in verse 10, "immediately the angel departed from him." The angel had been doing everything, but then he suddenly left Peter to himself. Imagine that—Peter standing there in the street, bewildered, and wondering what to do next.

When We Come to Ourselves by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Two things are said about Peter, one in verse 11, and the other verse 12. The first is that, "When Peter had come to himself, he said," and the second, in verse 12, is "So, when he had considered this..."

What was he considering? Peter's mind must have been racing with everything that had just happened to him. Once Peter had realized that he was in the street, and not very far from the prison and the guards, he must have thought to himself, "I had better do something."

He probably considered the question: "Where is the most likely place the brethren would be?" So he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark.

Let us look at the two statements that Peter "came to himself," and considered what had happened, in light of what we are told about him, that Peter went out and (in verse 9) "did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision."

Please bear in mind, that there is a contrast here that is very interesting. Peter did not know what he was doing while he was following the angel mechanically, and then, in contrast, Peter came to himself, considered, reasoned, analyzed, arrived at a decision, and acted upon his decision.

Here, we see two aspects of each and every Christian's life. Often we emphasize the miraculous and the supernatural. But here, we are looking at what we may call the normal and physical human, that is Peter standing there bewildered. A miracle had just happened to him, but he was frozen, for a moment anyway.

The issue, at this point, is the place of the miraculous and supernatural in the Christian's life and experience. Included in the statement not only are the miraculous, but also the issue of the supernatural guidance, and direction in our Christian life.

There is really no difference, in principle, between being guided by an actual angel, and receiving within that miraculous supernatural guidance that is so definitely part of our Christian lives.

Keep in mind, we are gathering whatever information we can from this miraculous incident. It gives us great insight into the combination of miraculous intervention, and human responsibility.

So visualize Peter, mechanically following the angel, not knowing exactly what he was

When We Come to Ourselves by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

doing. Then a moment later the angel left him. Here, we see Peter thinking, considering, ruminating, working out a problem, and acting on his own decisions.

When he had "come to himself," he realized an angel had rescued him from Herod's wrath. No doubt he was thrilled, to say the least, about what had happened to him.

This expression in verse 11, "when Peter had come to himself" means, when he had overcome his amazement and astonishment at his unexpected deliverance, he was finally capable of reflecting upon what had just happened to him. He had been amazed by the whole maneuver, but now finally able to contemplate it.

Thinking that what had just happened was a vision, and the suddenness and rapidity with which it was done, Peter did not have any time for sensible reflection. His mind was no doubt racing once he had come out of the fog that he was in from being woken up, and almost dragged out of there by the angel.

The events of divine intervention—overwhelming, confounding, orchestrated suddenly and unexpectedly—often leaves no time for calm thought and contemplation.

Let us shift gears here, and look at some dangers that arise in the minds of people with regard to miracles and other divine interventions.

Tragically, in the history of the church, there has been the problem that people have often gone from one extreme to the other. Some emphasize the miraculous and the supernatural only, as if there were no other aspect of a Christian's life. Others exclude the miraculous and the supernatural altogether, and think of the Christian's life as nothing but a form of philosophy.

Many people base their conduct and life, their outlook and activity, on one or the other of these belief systems. That has led to a third element in the tragedy—the curious tendency on the part of people to play the one against the other, to exalt the one against the other. It is a curious thing about the mind that we seem to find it very difficult to hold two ideas at the same time. It is possible that there is both the miraculous element and also human responsibility involved.

In order to understand God's truth, we have to realize that there are ultimately certain contradictions between two apparent equally valid principles, or from inferences correctly drawn from such principles, that just cannot be resolved with the human mind. They are things that must be spiritually understood. Often, these principles are called 'paradoxes'—something seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet

When We Come to Ourselves by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

is true. For example, evil and beauty—something can be evil (and therefore spiritually ugly), but humans still find it attractive.

And now, back to the point that we do not have to say that it is entirely miraculous, or entirely not all miraculous. Things are not always "either/or" in this negative sense, and we do not have to substitute for it "both/and." There is no need to emphasize the one thing to the exclusion of the other, often the two things are both valid. For example, think about spiritual slavery and freedom. Although we are free to sin, we can become a slave to sin.

Here are three reasons why this is important:

The first practical reason is that we must be intellectually honest. Many people today are intellectual, but not honest. We see this in our politicians. All we have to do is watch a few seconds of what the politicians are saying about the financial crisis, and watch them pass legislation that is destroying this nation, to see vivid examples of intellectual dishonesty.

Maybe in their case, the term "intellectual" is a stretch, since it does not seem like they are using their brains at all, to save us out of our dilemma. Either that, or they are deeply imbedded in a treasonous conspiracy to tear down this nation. Their lives are full of darkness, and their beliefs are based on situation ethics, they see evil as beautiful. So we are only going to get a picture painted beautiful, when in reality there is actually evil behind it.

We cannot allow our Christian lives to be dark and vague, in our understanding of God's Truth. Doing nothing, accomplishes nothing. We have to zealously pursue God's approval. One way to do this is to make sure we are rightly handling Scripture, which contrasts with the meaningless disputes of false teachers of religion.

II Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker [a doer] who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

It is our responsibility to think, reason, and understand as far as we possibly can. It is the responsibility of every member of God's church to search for and do the truth, and this leads to the light. We cannot remain in spiritual darkness, and be a true member of the church. This is what Peter was forced to do when the angel left him. He was forced to take God's truth, and what he knew, and apply it in what was the right thing to do at that point. He chose to go and spend the time with the brethren who were praying.

When We Come to Ourselves by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

John 3: 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.

The evil of human beings is reflected in their fleeing from the light; at the same time, anything good is the product of God's work. The word of God argues against ignorance and opposition to the spread of true knowledge. While at one and the same time, we see in the media an all out effort to subvert true knowledge.

Without doubt, there has been nothing in the history of the world that has so stimulated people to think and reason, as the written word of God. It is our duty to search the Scriptures, and understand them as best we can, no matter how upsetting they may be to our personal ideas and preferences, we still must hold our lives up to the standard of scripture, which is the inspired Word of God.

I Thessalonians 2:13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

This is the way that we decide what is the right thing to do at any time in life, especially after the divine intervention of God, or a miracle, which are sometimes one and the same thing. We are to be doers of the word, not just hearers, as you are well familiar with the scripture. We have all witnessed how easy it is to shut oneself in a certain circle, repeating the same ideas, imitating the same phrases, and refusing to consider questions and problems beyond that specific group. Humanly, it is very comforting to live that way. But the New Testament condemns such a life. It is our duty to face the truth, and explain the facts as best we can, and not to stick our heads in the sand.

We should always be on guard to avoid doing and saying anything that may disgrace God's truth. Extravagant untrue claims on Christianity's behalf will mislead and antagonize people, as we see in mainstream Christianity.

People have claimed miraculous intervention when it is clearly and patently something that can be explained very easily in human terms. (I am not referring to God's design of the human body to heal itself—His design of it is itself miraculous.) I am referring to fraudulent claims of miracles, as we see made by some televangelists. Such false and extravagant claims cause other intelligent people to distrust Christianity. Often it is a ploy by Satan to discredit and blur God's truth. We are bound in the interests of God's

When We Come to Ourselves by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

truth, and the church, to understand the true doctrines and rightly apply God's truth, so we do not put it in a bad light. This is in not inferring, stating, or saying, that the televangelists are preaching God's truth. I believe that what they have is a false teaching.

The second practical reason, why it is important to have right and wise reasoning, is that it is the one way of avoiding certain unpleasant and unhappy experiences that sooner or later always become the case of those who refuse to think.

Often in mainstream Christianity (and I suppose in God's church as well) we run into people who have had the impression that the Christian life is nothing but a series of miracles, and who suddenly find themselves in a position where the miracle does not seem to take place. Realistically, and truly, in our lives we are constantly a miracle, by just the fact that we are in God's church. I am not referring to that kind of thing, I am referring to the people who think that every time they turn around, whether they pick up a spoon, or shake a salt and pepper shaker, that a miracle has been performed. I am talking about those extremes.

They think that God has left them, and many of them think that they must have sinned against the Holy Spirit. They become greatly depressed and sometimes actually go into a state of mental illness and imbalance.

The way to avoid that, is to try to understand the biblical teaching with regard to the interrelationship of the supernatural and the natural.

Consider faith and healing. Healing is a miracle and not to be considered lightly. The definition of a miracle is, "An event beyond the power of any known physical laws to produce; a supernatural occurrence produced by the power of God."

He is the supernatural God—not man. And He intended people He calls to have a direct and intimate contact with Him through Christ. Those called are called to become His begotten children, and by growing in grace and Christ's knowledge in spiritual character, to be born, by a resurrection, into the God Family.

God's people, whom He has called, must remember that, "without faith it is impossible to please him" as Hebrews 11:6, reveals. And He is the Giver of faith. But when a miracle has been worked, if we do not continue at that point to use the gift God has given us, that is, right and wise reasoning, it may be because we are lacking in faith.

Why do some people not have faith at this point? When a miracle has taken place, or

When We Come to Ourselves by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

divine intervention has taken place, it may be because the person has decided in his own mind that he will not get an answer to what he should do next. Often people wait until they get a certain feeling, a kind of assurance that they can feel, before they really believe they will have an answer. But that is not faith! That is feeling!

Our feeling—our impressions—has nothing to do with faith. Faith has to do with God's Word. The essential question is, "Has God promised it in the Bible?" God has thousands of ways we know nothing of to answer and provide whatever He has promised. We do not need to see how He is going to do it or even when. In fact, He will almost never do it the way that we expect. We are trusting in supernatural power—unlimited power! God works His wonders in mysterious ways. What He has promised He will perform; but He will do it His way, and in His time frame. That is why we should always pray, "Not Your will but mine..."

We are to leave that to Him and trust Him to guide our steps, but we must take the steps. Just like Peter did. The angel left him there standing in the street, and Peter had to do something. We must decide when and where to step using right and wise reasoning based on His Word.

Remember, faith is the gift of God. We tend to think that everything else that comes from God is His gift, that the faith required to receive these things is something we ourselves have to strain and strive to achieve. That is not necessarily so! We have to just trust God, even for the faith by which we receive everything else.

Ephesians 2:8-10 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

We should "walk in them," or we should do something. And that something is to do what God has instructed us.

The passage of Revelation 14:12 is a description of God's true church today. Those in His church have the faith of Jesus. It is not just our faith in Him, but His faith—the extraordinary faith with which He performed His miracles—placed in us and acting in us. How can we receive the gift of Jesus Christ's faith? Draw closer to God. Get to know God. Surrender all the way to Him and do His will. We get to know Him through Bible study and prayer, and listening to His ministers teach the truth.

When We Come to Ourselves by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

The third practical reason, why it is important to have right and wise reasoning, is that this is the only way that we can be sure, ahead of time, that we will always know what to expect and what to do should we ever find ourselves in the same kind of position that Peter found himself when the angel led him out of the prison and down the street, and then left him. Not that exact situation necessarily, but one where God has intervened, but seemingly left us to finish the episode on our own. I say seemingly, because God never really leaves us on alone, as His children.

We do not know what the future holds for us. There may be a dreadful time of persecution ahead of us. What are we to expect, what are we to do if we find ourselves in those circumstances similar to where Peter found himself?

It is only as we have learned to understand something of the fine dividing line between these two elements that we will be forearmed and prepared for any emergency that may arise. What is our personal responsibility when it seems like God has left us to our own?

Let me give you the Old Testament example of David and his six hundred men—one of David's conflicts with the Amalekites.

In I Samuel 30 we find the incident where David and his band were forced to fight the Amalekites, the sworn enemies of the Lord and of the Israelites. Since Saul had only won an incomplete victory over the Amalekites earlier, they were still occasioned to attack the Israel, and that is exactly what they were doing.

I Samuel 30:1-2 Now it happened, when David and his men came to Ziklag, on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the South and Ziklag, attacked Ziklag and burned it with fire, and had taken captive the women and those who were there, from small to great; they did not kill anyone, but carried them away and went their way.

The verb "carried them away," is literally drove them off. It paints a picture of animals being driven by herdsman.

I Samuel 30:3-5 So David and his men came to the city, and there it was, burned with fire; and their wives, their sons, and their daughters had been taken captive. Then David and the people who were with him lifted up their voices and wept, until they had no more power to weep. And David's two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite, had been taken captive.

The Amalekite leaders knew that David was at Gath and all were distracted and focusing on the confrontation between Israel and the Philistines. This was a perfect time to retaliate against David for his raids, and to pick up some spoils of war as well.

David's family and many of his men's families were in Ziklag. Since most of the men were with David, the residents of Ziklag could not put up any resistance, and the invaders easily kidnapped the people and took whatever wealth they could find. They burned the city as an act of vengeance.

We can only imagine the horror and grief of the undefeated David and his 600 men. Their city was burned, their wealth had been confiscated, and their wives and children had been kidnapped. It was by the mercy of God that the Amalekites spared the lives of the women and children.

We are told in verse 6, that David was "greatly distressed," a verb that means he was pressed into a tight corner, the way a potter would press clay into a mold. So we get a very dismal picture of their condition.

Some of the people wanted to stone David. Being beaten down, humiliated and defeated, and dangerously upset, they looked for someone to blame—someone to hold responsible. This is the way of human nature. Their human nature drove them to react with foolishness by demanding his death. They needed their courageous leader David more than ever, but they did not seem to realize or care that his death would solve nothing. Running on emotion they were stupidly irrational.

Friends and family taken, the men were obviously distressed, letting their emotions rule their actions—it did no good to lose their tempers. So, you had David turning to God, but his people, the men that were left, losing their tempers. When people lose their tempers they are frozen in rage, and cannot make those wise decisions.

Even in his distraught state of mind, David realized that the encouragement he needed could only come from God. So, he ordered Abiathar the priest to bring the ephod, and together they sought God's will.

Saul had consulted God earlier, but had not received an answer, but God mercifully replied to David's request. Even though David was not in complete obedience, God answered him because David's heart was turning to God more and more all of the time, and had truly been there since his youth.

When We Come to Ourselves by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

I Samuel 30:6-15 Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the **LOORD** his God. Then David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech's son, "Please bring the ephod here to me." And Abiathar brought the ephod to David. So David inquired of the **LOORD**, saying, "Shall I pursue this troop? Shall I overtake them?" And He answered him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them and without fail recover all." So David went, he and the six hundred men who were with him, and came to the Brook Besor, where those stayed who were left behind. But David pursued, he and four hundred men; for two hundred stayed behind, who were so weary that they could not cross the Brook Besor. Then they found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David; and they gave him bread and he ate, and they let him drink water. And they gave him a piece of a cake of figs and two clusters of raisins. So when he had eaten, his strength came back to him; for he had eaten no bread nor drunk water for three days and three nights. Then David said to him, "To whom do you belong, and where are you from?" And he said, "I am a young man from Egypt, servant of an Amalekite; and my master left me behind, because three days ago I fell sick. "We made an invasion of the southern area of the Cherethites, in the territory which belongs to Judah, and of the southern area of Caleb; and we burned Ziklag with fire." And David said to him, "Can you take me down to this troop?" So he said, "Swear to me by God that you will neither kill me nor deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will take you down to this troop."

There comes a point when we have to finish the task mostly on our own. God seems to pull His hands back and let us carry on, using the wisdom from above to complete the mission, or the trial. God does this with loving-kindness and tender mercies. This is the state that David was in, and God told him what to do. David had to pick up from there, and actually physically do it.

In I Samuel 30:10, David received God's assurance that with His intervention, David's pursuit of the enemy would be successful. That is all David needed to know, so he and his men took off on their camels and traveled sixteen miles to the brook of Besor where two hundred men had to stay because they were exhausted.

I Samuel 30:10 But David pursued, he and four hundred men; for two hundred stayed behind, who were so weary that they could not cross the Brook Besor.

In verse 10, the Hebrew word translated "weary" in the New King James Version, and "faint" in the King James Version, and "exhausted" in the English Standard Version, and New International Version translations, literally means "dead tired."

This might have discouraged David, but he and his other four hundred men continued to travel. The problem was—they did not know where to go. God had not told them where the Amalekites were camped, but David trusted God to guide him.

It was then that they found a very sick Egyptian slave, who had been abandoned by his Amalekite master. The slave could have died in the wilderness, but God had kept him alive for the sake of His servant David. The slave's master must have been a fairly important Amalekite, since his servant knew the plans of the Amalekite raiding party, and could lead David to their camp. So even before David knew that God was preparing this man to lead David to where he should go, David in faith headed off listening to God, knowing that God would provide the answers. But had David not taken those first steps and gone, he would never have received the answers needed to get his family back.

The master must have expected his slave to die, and so he left him figuring that any essential information about the Amalekite's pillaging plans would die with him. But God had something else in mind for the slave and kept him alive to tell what he knew so David could rescue the Israelite families that had been kidnapped.

I Samuel 30:16-19 And when he had brought him down, there they were, spread out over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing, because of all the great spoil which they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah. Then David attacked them from twilight until the evening of the next day. Not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men who rode on camels and fled. So David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away, and David rescued his two wives. And nothing of theirs was lacking, either small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything which they had taken from them; David recovered all.

In their enthusiastic false confidence, the Amalekites were celebrating their great victory when David and his men attacked and caught the camp by surprise. The Jewish Israelites killed the Amalekites, except four hundred young men who escaped, rescued all the people who had been kidnapped, and recovered all the belongings that had been taken from Ziklag. We see in those scriptures the words all, all and all, fulfilling God's promise to David that he would recover all. Not some, not most of, not damaged things,

but everything intact. How encouraging that is to us, that God goes to such detail to answer our requests and our prayers.

So the question to you is this: Are we represented by the reliable two thirds, or are we represented by the undependable one third? Do we find every excuse to avoid meeting with God's people? Are we dependable enough to show up for something when we say we will? God tests us in the little things to see if we will be people of our word, or unreliable, undependable, and unstable, as those two hundred weary men were who stayed behind were. Sometimes we are dead tired, but we have to rise above that feeling and perform the duty at hand. Our duty is to come before God and to worship Him. That is not in the case of being sick or contagious, but certainly all of the men of the family should be here to worship God, to represent their families. That is a command in the Old Testament, and we also find the principle in the New Testament as well. As I said, God tests us in the little things to see if we are people of our word.

The effects of the challenges of life are handled in different ways by different people, so the results and the lessons learned are not always the same for everyone. The account says that, "David strengthened himself in the Lord his God." Look at what God did for David in that dark hour in his life, and you will see how God works with us when problems and crises come into our lives.

Here are seven lessons we can learn from this account of David listening to God, and getting all back.

First, God waited for David to strengthen himself by putting his faith and reliance on the most dependable being in existence—the Great God! In some ways you can see parallels to our conversion process here, when we are called, and then on through the conversion process.

Second, God gave David the necessary encouragement so that he did not continue to despair. Once David had made the right decision to trust God, God reinforced David's faith and courage. Whenever a crisis comes, we need the courage to face it. We cannot blame others or act as if nothing is wrong.

Third, God gave David the necessary wisdom to know what to do. He was to build on the knowledge that he had already acquired, and add to it the necessary facts of the situation, and diligently apply it in a righteous manner.

Fourth, God gave David the necessary perseverance to do it. He and his men were exhausted, but God enabled David and 400 of his men, to persevere in their quest for

When We Come to Ourselves by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

the Amalekite invaders. Those 200 men who were too weary were not empowered because they were weary in well-doing. God gives us the perseverance to rise above the dead tired way we feel to perform the duty at hand. I might add, that if we say that we cannot do something, or that God is just not going to work it out, we cannot make it to the Feast next year, then we have already decided for God what will happen in our lives.

Fifth, God provided David with the necessary facts so that he could find where his enemy was camping in that vast wilderness. When we step out on faith and trust God, He will guide us with what we need. Remember last year, when we were all wondering whether we were going to be able to make it to the Feast. We were asking God to get us there. The gasoline was so expensive, but what did God do? He performed a miracle. The gasoline dropped, and it was affordable so that we could go to the Feast. There is nothing that God cannot do. He lowered the gasoline, but how many people stayed home, because they had already decided that they could not afford the gasoline. They did not take that next step that God requires of us, or when He performs a miracle, or divinely intervenes on our behalf.

Sixth, once David and his four hundred men had made the effort, God gave David and his men the necessary physical strength to defeat the enemy and recover all of their families and friends and countrymen being held captive; and God even went above and beyond by helping them recover all their wealth. Remember when David attacked the Amalakites? It was at twilight, and it says that he fought and he fought until evening the next day. For roughly twenty four hours they continued to fight and did not give up, or give in. So they rose above the weariness and they performed the duty at hand.

Seventh, God gave David and his men the necessary and ultimate victory over the enemy.

Psalm 37:5 "Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass."

That is an absolute promise; there are no doubts in that. There is nothing to be anxious over. He promises that very thing. "Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass." Although this verse primarily refers to reputation or character as the next verse shows, the principle is still valid that it is God who brings things to pass for those who trust in Him. It is God who gives the ultimate victory.

"Commit your way to the Lord" in the Hebrew is "Roll your way upon the Lord." I Peter

When We Come to Ourselves by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

5:7, has a similar promise, "[cast] all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."

The idea is that of rolling a heavy burden off from our selves onto another, or laying it on Him, so that He can bear it. The burden that we do not have strength to bear we can lay on God. But we do not determine that the burden is too great for us before we try; we do the right thing first and then God gives us the strength to bear up under the burden.

The term "way" means 'the act of treading or going. So then, a way or path; a course of life, or the manner in which one lives; and the reference here is to the whole course of life, or all that can affect life; all our plans or conduct; all the issues or results of those plans.

"Way," in Psalm 37:5, is equivalent to "lot" or "destiny." It refers to everything, in regard to the manner in which we live, and all its results, are to be committed to, or to the glory of God, "Commit your way to the Lord."

It is our bound duty to face the question: How do we know what to do when the miracle, or the divine intervention, has happened and we are seemingly left to continue on our own?

Acts 12:10-12 When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. And when Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people." So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.

We have to recognize the definite fact of the miraculous, divine intervention in our Christian life. That God intervenes and performs miracles in our lives is a fact. It is an absolute! Either we accept the inspired written word of God we call the Holy Bible, or we do not. If we do accept it then we must accept the fact that there are miracles being performed.

Christianity is based either upon the revelation of God that we have here, or it is a human invention. The Old and New Testaments are our supreme authority for matters of faith and conduct. We never need to apologize to anyone in this world for that.

There must be a certain foundation before any discussion, having to do with true Christianity, is possible. Two cannot walk together unless they are agreed. The position throughout the ages and centuries has been that true believers have accepted the essentials of Christianity as stated in this book that we are looking at right now. If that is done, then it is inevitable that the fact of the miraculous and the supernatural must not only be accepted, but accepted as one of the first and main elements of the Christian life, and I will add to that true Christianity. There is a lot of pseudo or false Christianity out there in the world.

A person cannot believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of the world, unless he accepts the record of Him in the Four Gospels, including the miracles. Not only did He work miracles, He does work miracles! There have been certain signs and evidences, and there will be certain signs and evidences!

These things that I am telling you today, in this sermon, are essential to surviving what is to come in this world, as this world continues to disintegrate, and laws are ignored, and Satan's wrath comes, and ultimately God's wrath comes. If it were not for the enmity that exists in mankind against God, this would be clearly seen by all.

Romans 1:18-20 ESV For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

This is one of my favorite verses in all of the Bible.

Coming to the Acts of the Apostles, we find a repetition of the same thing. The miraculous element constantly enters into it, and we must accept the credibility of those first witnesses. According to these men of the early days of God's church, God revealed this evidence of miracles and supernatural power. God worked special miracles by the hands of Peter and Paul that led to a great increase in membership in the church. The fact of the miracles is beyond dispute.

As we trace the history of the true church we find the same thing, not only of working miracles, but also of God's miraculous guidance. God intervenes in the lives of His saints. He did something or so manipulated their circumstances as to cause them to be

When We Come to Ourselves by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

led to a specific purpose.

The apostle Paul was brought to the place where he could acknowledge that God worked things out in his life, and he said, "I am what I am by the grace of God." He gave all credit to God for any good that was in him.

Being a Christian is not a matter of just being good, decent and moral. It means the intervention of God in our lives. It means the coming of the Eternal into human experience and understanding.

Let us go on to another principle about how this miraculous element works and operates in the life of a Christian. The miraculous happens only in God's time frame, as I mentioned earlier.

That is very obvious in this story of Peter being freed from prison. The angel came to Peter when he was asleep. Peter just follows the angel. God always makes the first move in these miracles and in this event.

Acts 12:11-12 And when Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people." So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.

I said that God always acts first, and He does although often He requires that we pray and ask Him to intervene for us. It is God who has brought us to the point where we believe and pray to Him, and where we are able to pray a righteous prayer.

When we read the account of the actual miracles worked by the apostles the same thing is quite obvious. We never find the apostles giving out an announcement that they are going to work a miracle the next day or some other day. They are never blowing the trumpet to call the crowds.

What a contrast that is to how the soapbox preachers announce their engagements. Some today put out advertisements that miracles will be worked next Thursday evening, and invite people to the meeting. There is nothing like that in the New Testament. Immediately a minister that does that is suspect, and very likely is a false minister.

Take, for example, an instance in Acts 14. Paul observes a man at Lystra without

When We Come to Ourselves by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

strength in his feet, sitting, who was a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked. Probably he had never seen the man before, and had no prior intention of working a miracle on his behalf. Then, God granted Paul the spiritual discernment to see that the man had the faith to be healed.

We find this in every instance and example throughout Scripture. It is always something that happens in God's good time.

When we look at the past history of the church, we find the same thing true of every revitalization of the church. There have been special supernatural times in the history of the church. They come when least expected. God raises up a leader that He uses to revitalize the church.

At times, He works out His purpose in a very visible way that may involve a rapid increase in spiritual knowledge and understanding, followed by a dramatic increase in membership. We read of this in the early years of the church in the first century; we saw it in the twentieth century, and read of various times in between. Then it passes, and the church goes through a period of the ordinary, and the routine, and the mundane. Let me explain what I mean by that.

I think in many ways these ordinary and mundane times are the greatest time of testing, because it requires a great deal of perseverance, devotion, determination and resolve, to keep oneself from becoming weary in well-doing. Here are a few familiar scriptures that express this:

Galatians 6:9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

II Thessalonians 3:10-13 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.

Obviously, work and doing are very important to God. And I might add, that I do not know of anyone in this congregation that is not working, or working hard and trying to do their part. So please do not think that I am pointing the finger at anyone, but this is a biblical principle that we have to apply in all that we do, not only our daily work, but also

When We Come to Ourselves by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

our spiritual lives.

In Revelation 2, Christ revealed to John both encouragement and warning, for the Ephesian church. This is certainly applicable to us today, especially now in the end-time.

Revelation 2:2-5 "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

That is a very dire warning, not only did He compliment those people, but that was not enough, they had become weary. They tried their best not to become weary, but the life of a persecuted Christian can only be persevered with God's help.

Then following this mundane, ordinary time, there comes revitalization. Human beings cannot organize a renewal. They may have meetings to attempt organization, but they never produce revitalization in that way. They may take notice of the results, but the revitalization is God-made.

The next thing, is that God always does what people cannot do for themselves. This miraculous element comes in when man is face to face with something he cannot do. Peter there in prison was just helpless, chained to a soldier on each hand, the doors shut and bolted, two guards outside the door, and the great iron gates beyond.

God works in a miraculous and exceptional way when man is faced with a situation where he cannot do anything for himself. That is the principle that is equally applicable in all the other cases and examples found in the Bible, and all the subsequent history of the church.

That leads to the next principle. Miracles stop at the point when man's capacity is sufficient. Man is then left to face the situation alone, or so he thinks he is, but as I mentioned earlier God is never away from us, but sometimes we do feel alone. That is why this miracle is so interesting. Remember, Acts 12:11 says, "And when Peter had come to himself," that is, after the angel had departed from him. Peter reached the point

where he could use his own mind.

He is left considering for himself to which house he should go. The angel did not lead him to the house of the mother of John Mark. Peter does all that for himself. It may be that God put that in his mind, but Peter still had to take that first step, and think about it and contemplate it. The miraculous stops just at the point when man's capability is sufficient, and there it leaves man seemingly to himself.

The lesson here is very clear—that we must not expect, in our Christian experience, a constant manifestation of the miraculous, and the supernatural. The miraculous is the exception, not the mundane, not the ordinary. Once a thing is ordinary it is no longer miraculous. Of course, I am talking about the truly magnificent miraculous things. As I said earlier, we are miracles in ourselves that God has performed and being in this church, and being able to overcome sin. All the credit goes to God.

The miraculous takes us to that point at which we can begin to act and reason for ourselves. God works this way because He is developing and producing kings and priests for His kingdom. If He performed a miracle and did everything step by step all of the way where we did not have to lift a foot, what would we learn in the way of not only trusting Him all along the way, but in ruling and teaching His truth.

Why are there the miraculous element and the ordinary? Why does the miraculous do so much for us after it has been performed and we are left to ourselves?

Under the miraculous a person is more or less in an automatic state. We observe that in Peter, who did not know what was really happening to him. He thought he saw a vision. It is a mechanical state in which a person does not know why or how. It is automatic. When you are in a fog you are not sure what is going on. If you have ever had an operation or had painkillers for any other reason and they affected your mind, you are not sure that you are totally there. You are fading in and out, and you cannot think clearly, and you are not sure what is a dream and what is reality.

It is only when a person "comes to himself," in the sense of this passage, and begins to reason that he truly grasps the significance of the miraculous, that he actually is able to react correctly.

Let us put this in terms of the experience of conversion. In a sense, a person is aware of something happening, but does not know what is taking place. He is in a blessed and rare state of mind upon his calling, and through the spiritual conversion process.

When We Come to Ourselves by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

It is only when he comes to think about it afterwards—to reflect—and reads his Bible and understands God's Truth that he begins to understand the significance of it all. The actual experience of the process of conversion does not in itself tell of the depth of eternal love that sent the Only-Begotten One to bear our sins.

It is as we grow in grace and knowledge that we begin to appreciate something of godly love. At first we are in an automatic state that may be an enjoyable state; we do not truly grasp the depth of this great salvation found in Christ.

In other words, "considered"(that is the word in Acts 12:12, describing Peter's thought process), "So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying."

"Considered" has a distinct place in the life of the Christian. God does not want us to act as machines. He has made us, and has given us a mind, a brain, the power to reason and think.

To act like a machine would imply a contradiction in God's own creative work. God has so ordered it that there are some things that He only can do, and having done them He leaves us to ourselves that we may think about them and reason concerning them, that we may consider them, and meditate on them.

So we have here a perfect blending of the action of God, and the action of man. It is God who empowers man to be able to work with God, but nevertheless we have our responsibility. The impossible can only be done by God, but what a tragedy it is that people wait and expect that God will do what is possible for them to do themselves.

It is a tragedy that so many spend their Christian lives sitting around waiting for God to do something. If they considered the thing that Peter did, it would be perfectly obvious that there are many things they could do for themselves.

So God encourages us, shows us the facts, imparts wisdom, gives us perseverance, and grants us the strength to do what is necessary. What do we have to worry about, or, fret over? Absolutely nothing!

Paul tells the Philippian church they cannot be content with past accomplishments, but need to demonstrate their faith day by day as they cultivate and develop their relationship with God.

Philippians 2:12-15 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not

When We Come to Ourselves by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.

Fear of God's judgment is a cause for right and serious living, that is the "fear and trembling," but it is not that Paul wants us to be anxious about never being good enough to be worthy of God's favor. Rather, it is God's love and enabling grace that will see us through: it is God who works in us.

We can rejoice in God's empowering presence even as we work hard at living responsible Christian lives. We know that salvation is not earned by works. When Paul uses the word "salvation" in verse 12, he is writing in general terms of progressively coming to do, and experience, all of the aspects and blessings of salvation.

Our continued obedience is an inherent part of "working out" our salvation, in this sense. But as verse 13 expresses, these works are the result of God's work within us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. So, although sometimes it seems like God has left us to force us to go ahead on our own, He has never really left us.

Even the 'desire' or 'will' to do what is good comes from God; but he also works in us to generate actual good choices. We must do the things we are competent to do, the things that we are expected to do.

What if Peter, having been left by the angel, just went on waiting in the street where he was, believing that the angel would come back again to tell him where he should go. It is easy to guess what the result would be.

The alarm would have been given in the prison, the soldiers would have been searching the streets, and Peter would very soon have found himself back again behind the iron gates. And that is exactly what would happen to the man who does nothing in his Christian life. The gates of hell ('hades' ? the grave) cannot prevail against the church, but if it were possible they may against the individual person who does nothing.

When God has done the impossible for us and has placed us on our feet, He pays us the great compliment of expecting us to think and reason for ourselves, and to not waste any time in getting to a place of safety.

When We Come to Ourselves by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

'When we come to ourselves' we recognize that the miraculous often only goes so far and then leaves us as beings endowed by God with qualities wonderful enough—sizeable enough—for us to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.