



**FOR PASTORS**

**When the Cutting Edge  
Is Gone!**

**II KINGS 6:1-7**

**When the man lost “his cutting edge” he was painfully  
conscious of his loss!**

**Today, many preachers continue to swing the “Axe Handle”  
but... “no chips are flying!”**

**If you have lost your “cutting edge” - do you want it back?  
Elisha asked, “Where fell it?”**

**YOU MUST GO BACK TO WHERE YOU LOST IT!**



## WHEN THE CUTTING EDGE IS GONE

### II KINGS 6:1-7

Open your Bible to Second Kings chapter 6. I love the Old Testament. There are some tremendous pictures in the Old Testament. I realize that we are not in the Old Testament age as we open to this book, and that you and I live in a New Testament age. However, I hope everyone understands this. You cannot preach out of the Old Testament without preaching out of the New Testament. Think about this.

The New is in the Old concealed. The Old is in the New revealed.  
The New is in the Old contained. The Old is in the New explained.  
The New is in the Old foreknown. The Old is in the New full known.

### II Kings 6:1-7

*"And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye. And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants. And he answered, I will go. So he went with them. And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood. But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed. And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim. Therefore said he, Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it."*

### COLLEGE STUDENTS ARE BUILDING A BUILDING FOR GOD'S WORK

Let me give you the "setting" of this text. There were a group of young men in "Bible College" preparing for the ministry. The man of God Elisha was with them. Apparently, Elisha was their leader and their teacher. How long this Bible College had been going on, we have no way of knowing. However, God was blessing the work. The ministry had grown to the point that the building in which they were meeting became too small. There was no room for new students.

#### *The Problem They Faced*

They had God's blessing and the ministry was growing. The building in which they were meeting was too small. It seems that the entire student body got together with Elisha and shared with him that there were other students who wanted to join them and prepare for the ministry, but the place where they were meeting was too small.

#### *The Plan They Desired*

These young men were clearly godly young men. They were willing to work and wanted to grow. They were "young and zealous" yet old enough to know that without "older and wiser" leadership, it would be a mistake to "jump up and take off" on their own. Therefore, they sought the permission and blessing of their leader. They asked Elisha, the prophet, permission to leave the place where they were and to move toward the Jordan River. Elisha, no doubt, was blessed and encouraged by the young men's dedication and desire to "do greater things" for God. Therefore, he immediately gave them his permission. The young men knew they needed more than

permission. They needed leadership to have God's blessing and they asked Elisha to go with them. Elisha agreed and joined them. Seeking godly counsel and leadership is the key to God's blessings.

### *The People They Involved*

It is apparent from verse two that the young men were united, in one accord, and there was unity in the building program. The verse states, "Lets **us** go.... and **every** man took a beam..."

They arrived at the Jordon River, the site where the new building was going to be built and immediately went to work cutting down trees, excited about building the new facility. As the verses above stated, they were cutting trees down with axes. In those days, they did not have any "chain saws." In that day, axes were the only means they had for felling trees. Keep in mind, these were dedicated young men and were "working hard" at cutting down trees "for the glory of God!"

While one of the young men was swinging his axe and cutting on a tree, the **axe head** came loose and fell into the river! That was very common in those days. Axe heads coming loose from the handles was spoken of in Deuteronomy 19:5.

*"As when a man goeth into the wood with his neighbour to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slippeth from the helve, and lighteth upon his neighbour, that he die; he shall flee unto one of those cities, and live."*

Knowing that it was very common for an axe head to **slip** loose from the axe handle, - AND - knowing the danger and damage that could cause to their work when it "slipped" loose, each morning before beginning their day's work, the workers would check the axe head and sharpen the axe head.

### **THE "AXE HEAD" IN THE OLD TESTAMENT IS A PICTURE OF THE "HOLY SPIRIT" IN THE NEW TESTAMENT Acts 1:4-8**

The "cutting edge" in the Old Testament is a picture of "the power of the Holy Spirit" that the disciples were given in the New Testament to preach the Gospel and to serve God. From the following scripture we see that Jesus knew that the "Power of the Holy Spirit" was not only vitally important, but it was what the disciples needed to serve Him, but it was not only "what" they needed, but it was the "ONLY THING" the disciples needed for do the work He commanded them to do.

*"And, being assembled together with them, commanded them **that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father**, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But **ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you:** and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."*

Please notice! God commanded His disciples that **they "should not depart from Jerusalem...but wait..."** No doubt those men, after they had seen that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead, had a great desire to go out and immediately start "preaching that Jesus had risen from the dead - and that He was Christ - the Messiah!" The disciples were excited and "raring to go." To them it was urgent to "get going" and to preach the Gospel. However, **God COMMANDED them "not to depart, but to wait" for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.**

He continued in verse eight by giving the disciples a promise. What was that promise? God said, "**ye shall receive POWER after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.**" The power of the "axe head" in the Old Testament pictures the "**power of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.**" Now, let's return to our text in II Kings and see what happens.

### **THE WORKER LOST "HIS CUTTING EDGE" WHILE HE WAS WORKING**

That young man, along with a number of other young men, were working as hard as they could work, cutting down trees and building a building. While working, and working hard, one of the young men lost his axe head. The young man panicked! He CRIED "*and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed.*" Please make note and remember this truth! The axe head was the ONLY power the young man had! There was NO POWER in the axe handle! The young man could have continued to "swing the axe handle," but no chips would have been flying and no trees would have been falling. The young man could have continued to swing an axe handle and would have "looked very busy." No doubt, many people would have applauded him. However, he lost his "power" to cut trees - he lost the blessing of God on his work. The "cutting edge was gone!" and, please note, he "lost it while he was working!"

I know a young man who grew up at Thrifhaven Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. He was saved at a very early age and at about the age of 12 he said God had called him to preach. Over the period of 5-6 years he preached several times at our church. I was amazed at how well he handled the Scriptures. After high school he enrolled in one of the major Bible colleges in America. He was a fine young man, nice looking, good personality, well mannered, and was always talking about "the things of God." He excelled at the Bible college in which he studied. He graduated with honors. He won the "preacher boys" contest at the college he attended. After graduating from college, he returned to Memphis and started an independent Baptist church. It was slow, but it grew. Later, the church purchased property and built a very nice building. However, little by little, the church lost members and ceased to grow. Somewhere along the line, the young man "lost the cutting edge." When that happened, instead of "crying for God's help to recover the "axe head," he started "swinging the axe handle" in an attempt to make the church grow. He changed the church from an independent Bible believing Baptist church to a "non-denominational" church with a "strange name." He continued "swinging the axe handle" and started using "worldly methods" to try and attract a crowd. It changed from a fundamental, Bible believing church that stood for the Scriptures, to a worldly contemporary church that later closed their doors and sold their property! How sad!

Later, the young man resigned, saying he did not believe there was a God and that the Bible was not true. The last time I knew anything about that young man was when I saw a picture of him on Facebook. He was sitting on a motorcycle in a pair of blue-jeans, no shirt, long hair, sunglasses and a woman sitting on the back of the cycle - a woman who was not the woman he had married! The young man, one who started out with the power of God on his life, has now left the ministry

and formed an "Atheistic Club" and continued to say that there was no God. What happened? Somewhere along the line - while he was "working" he lost the "axe head" - he lost the power to live for and to serve God! The cutting edge was gone! Where did he lose it? I know exactly where he "lost the axe head" but I will not go into those details as it might identify who he is, and I do not desire to cause him anymore hurt than he has already suffered. He quit! That is exactly what Satan wanted!

I know another young man. He has died and I am confident that he is in Heaven with the Lord. He and I were at Thrifhaven Baptist Church together about 1963-65. This young man "taught me go door to door and soul win." He invited me to go on visitation with him. I had never been on visitation before. This man was "bold in the Lord" and knew how to explain the plan of Salvation as good as any one I have ever known. I went out visiting with him a good number of weeks and little by little he taught me how to approach people at their door and how to explain the Gospel very clearly and how to lead them to Christ. I am still indebted to that man!

After a couple of years, he started missing church on Wednesday night. Then he began skipping the Sunday night service. It was not long before he dropped out of church and I did not see him again for over 20 years. After 20 years, he came back to Thrifhaven as a visitor and it happened that I was preaching that night. After the service, he came down and began talking with me. I was glad to see him and had high hopes that he was there to get his life right with God and get back in God's house. I asked him a question about where he was in his Christian life and he said, "I'm not anywhere." Then he said, (pointing to the Bible I was holding), "How do I know that book is the Word of God and not just written by a bunch of men?" I was shocked. However, we talked a good while, but I got nowhere with him.

Several years later I heard he was sick and not doing well. I located his address and my son Joe and I went to visit him. He was seriously sick, close to death, and much more open to talking about the Lord. During that visit he told me that he was sure he was saved and going to Heaven. I asked him about why he left church and went the way he had gone. He asked me, "Do you want to know why I got out of church and quit serving the Lord?" I told him that I had wondered for years what happened, and yes, I would like to know what happened that caused him to lose his burden for souls and quit serving God, as it might help me help someone else who had the same problem. I won't go into detail, but he shared with me - a long story - about how he had gotten out of fellowship with God and ended up leaving the church and left God out of his life. In short, he had a certain sin in his life and WOULD not give it up. He said that he "lost his burden" to witness because he "stopped getting results!" Also, he got "tired" of God convicting him of the sin in his life and said he told God to, "Please stop bothering me! I enjoy smoking cigarettes, and I am not going to stop! Please leave me alone!" All of that happened while he was "working hard" but he lost the power of the Holy Spirit. He kept "swing the axe handle" for almost a year - but he had lost the power to serve God! The cutting edge was gone! That is exactly what Satan wanted.

I will share one more true illustration with you. I know a missionary who was affiliated with Fundamental Baptist World-Wide Mission while I was President of the Mission. He was an outstanding young man. He did deputation and raised his support in a very short time. He had a great personality, a good family, was a hard worker, and was a very good preacher. He went to a country in Africa, settled down, and began work planting a New Testament Baptist church in that country. God blessed in a good way. I talked with him several times while he was on the field. At first, he was excited and doing well.

One day I got an email from him saying that he was leaving the field, returning to the States and that he was resigning from the Mission! Again, I was shocked. I exchanged several emails with him and later was able to get him on the phone. After a long conversation about "why he was leaving the mission field" and leaving the "calling of God on his life" he shared how he had had a long-standing problem getting along with another missionary with whom he had been working. It was an older, veteran missionary. He told me "I have been putting up with him bossing me around for over a year. I have taken all I am going to take. I am quitting! I am coming home and getting me a regular job." We learned later that this young man and the veteran missionary had met and discussed the difference (which did not involve any doctrinal or moral issue) but they could not, rather, would not "work out their differences." This young man had continued for over a year, Rather than checking his "axe head" he had become bitter. He "lost his axe head," but continued to swing the "axe handle" - but to no avail! He got discouraged - he got bitter - he quit! That is exactly what Satan wanted!

I reasoned with him by phone the next few days until he stopped taking my calls. I asked him to possibly consider moving to another city in that country and starting another church. I made several other suggestions, but he was not open to anything except leaving what God had called him to do and returning to the States. What happened? He allowed Satan to get involved in his life and his work until he got bitter. He shared how he had gotten so bitter that he had stopped having his devotions. He had stopped praying. He had stopped everything except dealing with bitterness. He told me that he "got tired of the warfare" and was moving on. What happened? He lost the power of the Holy Spirit. He lost it "while he was working." He had continued to "swing the axe handle" for almost a year but the cutting edge was gone!

I will share with you one final example. I have been in foreign missionary work since 1969. In the later 1970s and early 1980s I was Vice-President of Maranatha Baptist Mission in Natchez, Mississippi. At that time, we had 102 active missionary families. However, we kept a "file-drawer" marked "resigned or dismissed." At the time that we had 102 missionary families, we had 235 file folds in that drawer of missionary families who had resigned or been dismissed. Over 90% of those were families who had "started right, were Godly people, gave clear testimony of how God had called them to the mission field." However, they had gone to the field, started a church, and were working hard. One by one, over the 25 years that Maranatha Baptist Mission had been in operation, each one of those families quit! Some lasted two or three terms. Others lasted less than one "four-year" term. A few "quit" before they had finished deputation! What happened? Somewhere along the way they lost the power of the Holy Spirit to remain faithful to their calling - and they quit! Every one of them - somewhere along the way, "lost the cutting edge" but continued to "swing the axe handle" - until they could not stand it any longer. They quit! The same percentage has been true at Fundamental Baptist World-Wide Mission over the past 35 years!

God does not and will not bless the "swinging of an axe handle." That is called "going through the motions." To go through the motions of serving God without the "power of God" is activity and nothing more. There is NO POWER in "swinging the axe handle." If you do not agree with that, please go to Revelation 3:1 and read what God was to the church at Sardis. *"And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou has a name that thou livest, **and are dead!**"* Why did God say that? That church was "swinging the axe handle," looking good, trying to "make a name" for themselves, but they were dead. They "lost the cutting edge." Activity does not have the blessings of God. That is like a soldier aiming his rifle, and pulling the trigger, but he has no

bullets! The only thing God blesses is when we use His Word, **"in the power** of the Holy Spirit." Paul made that clear in I Corinthians 2:1-5.

*"And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, **but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:** That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."*

The next thing we need to see is that...

### **HE LOST HIS "CUTTING EDGE" BECAUSE HE NEGLECTED TO CHECK THE AXE HEAD DAILY**

In those day, the axe was the "tool of choice" when building something out of wood. However, an axe HAS ALWAYS needed to be checked and sharpened daily. Working hard can be a waste of time and produce no results if the "axe head" is neglected.

### **REMEMBER TO SHARPEN THE CUTTING EDGE!**

A young man approached a foreman of a logging crew and asked for a job. "That depends," replied the foreman. "Let's see you chop down that tree." The young man stepped forward and skillfully chopped down a large tree and cut it down quickly. Impressed, the foreman exclaimed, "You can start Monday."

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday rolled by. Thursday afternoon the foreman approached the young man and said, "You can pick up your paycheck on the way out today."

Startled, the young man replied, "I thought you paid on Friday." "Normally we do," said the foreman. "But we're letting you go today because you've fallen behind. Our daily charts show that you've dropped in production from first place on Monday to last place today." The young man said, "But, I'm a hard worker. I arrive on the job first. I leave last and I have worked through my coffee breaks!" The foreman, sensing the young man's integrity, thought for a minute and then asked, "Have you been sharpening your axe head?" The young man replied, "No Sir, I've been working too hard to take time to do that."

If we are not careful, our lives will be like that. We sometimes get so busy - working for God - that we don't stop and take time to "sharpen the axe head." God wants us to work, BUT He does not want us to get so busy "serving and working" that we neglect the important things in ministry. He does not want us to neglect "spending time with Him." He does not want us to get so busy that we neglect to spend time in reading and studying His Word. He does not want us to get so busy that we neglect to spend time in prayer. He does not want us to get so busy that we forget to "sharpen the axe head." In Proverbs 27:17, the Bible states: *"Iron sharpeneth iron ..."* However, there is no better way to "sharpen an axe head" than spending time with God daily, in prayer and in His Word. If we do not "check and sharpen our axe head daily," we will become dull, discouraged, and downcast - and one day - we will quit!! Why? Because we have lost "the cutting edge." That is exactly what Satan wants us to



do. A preacher can "preach a great sermon" but get no results. Why? The "cutting edge is gone."

Before proceeding, I think it is worth inserting a personal note to anyone who is "full-time" in the ministry, like a pastor, an assistant pastor, a music director, a missionary or in any other type of a full-time ministry.

Keeping the "axe-head" sharp on a daily basis is the greatest danger you face. Why? Because you have "something to do **for God**." Therefore, every morning when you wake up and get out of bed you need to "sharpen your axe head." If you are not careful, it becomes easy to skip having time with God every morning, and you can "justify" skipping that time because you have things to do - "waiting on you at the church or the office" - things that are very important and need to be taken care of quickly. So, it becomes easy to say, "I'll get to the church and take care of 'this' and then I will have my time with God LATER." If you "put off" time with God to go out quickly and "swing the axe handle," the private time with God to "sharpen your axe head" seldom comes! Being in the ministry, I personally face this every day. It is VERY easy for me to "justify" not meeting with God, because I need to "swing the axe handle!"

### **SCRIPTURE ON HOW TO SHARPEN YOUR "AXE HEAD"**

*"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." (Joshua 1:8)*

*"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." (II Chronicles 7:14)*

*"He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." (Isaiah 40:29-31)*

*"Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts." (Zechariah 4:6)*

### **REMEMBER THAT THE "CUTTING EDGE" IS BORROWED**

The ONLY power you and I have is borrowed POWER. We have NO power of our own. There is no power in our abilities, no power in our skills, no power in our education, and no power in anything we do or plan, unless it is done in the "power of the Holy Spirit." I am not opposed to education, but the only thing you can hope to get by education is a "box of tools" to work with. It takes the **power of God** to use those tools. On that same subject there is no power in programs, no

matter how good they are. There is no power in any type of promotion or organizational plans, as good as they may seem to be. I am not against "promotions or organizations" but they MUST be done under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and they must be enacted and carried out in the "Power of the Holy Spirit of God!" If not, you are "swinging the axe handle" and you are "swinging it in vain."

**This is more important today than it has been since the time of the New Testament. This is important because we live "in the Laodicean age!** This New Testament church is "lukewarm." Therefore, in order to try and "get the members involved," the church begins offering "special gifts or rewards" in order to encourage the members to "invite and bring people to church." The idea is good, but the motive is wrong. In Matthew 6:1-6 and 19-21, God's Word gives us strong admonition against serving Christ for "worldly rewards."

*"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: **otherwise ye have no reward** of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. **Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.** But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. **Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.** But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and **thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.**"*

That is where the church is today. Why is this so serious? Because when the Christians in churches today serve the Lord for a "worldly reward" they will receive NO REWARD when they stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ!" None! God's Word clearly states, "... they have their reward!" The only motive acceptable to God for service is to follow the Apostle Paul. Paul stated that in II Corinthians 5:14:

*"For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:"*

Every Christian should serve Christ, because "the love of Christ constrains" them. Any other motive is unacceptable. When church members begin accepting "worldly rewards" to serve Christ, they are testifying that they have "left their first love." God clearly instructed us to "*Lay NOT up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will be your heart also.*" (Matthew 6:19-21)

The power of the Holy Spirit, which the disciples were instructed to wait for, is pictured in the instruction God gave to Moses when he built the Tabernacle.

**“AFTER THE PATTERN...EVEN SO SHALL YE MAKE IT!”**  
**Exodus 25:8-9**

God made that clear in the organization and building of the Old Testament Tabernacle. God gave Moses clear, specific instruction as to how he was to build the Tabernacle. God told Moses to build the Tabernacle "according to all that I show thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle...."

*"And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it." (Exodus 25:8-9)*

In other words, God told Moses three things:

(1) I am putting you in charge of the building of the Tabernacle. You are going to be the "General Contractor," - **but** I am not giving you permission to change one thing from the plan I have showed you.

(2) I am giving you the best and most skillful of all the workers to do the building of the Tabernacle. I know that they are smart. I know they are skillful, but I am not giving you permission to allow them to make any change of any kind in the pattern I have showed you. (Exodus 36:1)

(3) I am not giving you permission to make any type of changes, subtraction, or addition in order to "please the people!"

Now, let's go through the gate of the Tabernacle and go inside the "Holy Place." The "Holy Place" is a picture of the New Testament Church in EVERY aspect. We will see that God made it clear beyond doubt, that the "Power of the Holy Spirit" is the only power we as Christians and the church need. The power of the Holy Spirit is the only power we need. There are "three" pieces of furniture inside the "Holy Place." The "Table of Shewbread," the "Brazen Altar," and the "Golden Candlestick." Let's examine those three pieces of furniture.

(1) **The Table of Shewbread** (Exodus 25:23) In the New Testament church this pictures the "Word of God" that the priests were to "feed on."

*"Thou shalt also make a table of shittim wood: two cubits shall be the length thereof, and a cubit the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof. And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, and make thereto a crown of gold round about."*

There are a number of details in this piece of furniture. We want to note just two of them.

**First**, the table was made of shittim wood. "...*make a table of shittim wood*..." Feel free to study the Scriptures if you like, but the "shittim wood" is a picture of "humanity" and it was to be covered with gold. "*And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold*..." This is a picture of "man's humanity" being **covered with "God's Deity!"** Therefore, "man" is included in this when he "feeds on the Word of God." Man will study, read commentaries, compare Scripture with Scripture and a number of other things when he feeds on and studies the Word of God. Naturally, Man needs

God's help to understand and to "rightly divide" the Word of God, but man has to "do his part." He cannot just set his Bible on a table, open it and say, "God feed and teach me."

**Second:** The Table so Shewbread has measurements. "...*two cubits shall be the length thereof, and a cubit the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof ...*" That clearly indicated that there are "limitations" on the study, growing, and rightly dividing the Word of God. Man, over many years, can grow and grow and grow - but he will never "know it all." Paul stated in Philippians 3:12-14:

*"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."* (If the Apostle Paul had not "obtained or apprehended" none of us will -not in this life!)

At the day of mans' death, we will not have learned all that is in the Bible. We are limited. Please do not misunderstand me. I truly believe that we should study and grow to the highest of heights possible - in the life, but - when man dies, there will still be things he does not know in the Bible. He is limited by his own humanity! This pictures "wood (humanity)" and "God" working together - Man doing his part - God doing His part. God said, "My Word will not return void."

**(2) The Altar of Incense** (Exodus 30:1-3) This pictures the "Prayer Altar of the church or of the Christian" in their private home.

*"And thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon: of shittim wood shalt thou make it. A cubit shall be the length thereof, and a cubit the breadth thereof; foursquare shall it be: and two cubits shall be the height thereof: the horns thereof shall be of the same. And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, the top thereof, and the sides thereof round about, and the horns thereof; and thou shalt make unto it a crown of gold round about."*

There are a number of details in this piece of furniture, we want to note just two of them.

**First**, the "altar of incense" is made of shittim wood. "... of shittim wood shalt thou make it..." Again, the "shittim wood" is a picture of "man's humanity" and, "... *thou shalt overlay it with pure gold.*" This is a picture of "man's humanity" being **covered with "God's Deity!"**

Man is included in the ministry of prayer. He is responsible to approach the throne of God and present his supplications. Many times, man must be willing to "be a part of the answer" to things he prays about. If a man "pray and asked God" to save a friend or family member, he must be willing for God to use him and "be a part of the answer." There are times when man "should do something about a situation," instead of just saying, "I am going to pray about it and commit it to God." (See Joshua 7:6-13 - Especially verses 10-11). Man is responsible to "continue in prayer" on occasions. (Luke 18:1-6). This pictures "wood (humanity) and God" working together - Man doing his part - God doing His part.

**Second:** The Altar of Incense has measurement. "A cubit shall be the length thereof, and a cubit the breadth thereof; foursquare shall it be: and two cubits shall be the height thereof: This indicates that our prayers are limited. One such case where our prayers are limited is our prayers must be in "the will of God." (I John 5:14) God does not answer every prayer we pray. Sometimes He answers but does not answer "the way we want him to answer." Our prayers are limited.

**(3) The Golden Candlestick** (Exodus 25:31-40) In the New Testament church this pictures the "Light and the Oil of the Holy Spirit of God" that man is to "avail himself of" as he serves God. There are several symbols that testify that this is a picture of the Holy Spirit. Fire (Acts 2:3-4), Oil (Isaiah 61:1 & Acts 10:38), Lampstand (Revelation 4:5).

*"And thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold: of beaten work shall the candlestick be made: his shaft, and his branches, his bowls, his knops, and his flowers, shall be of the same. And six branches shall come out of the sides of it; three branches of the candlestick out of the one side, and three branches of the candlestick out of the other side: Three bowls made like unto almonds, with a knop and a flower in one branch; and three bowls made like almonds in the other branch, with a knop and a flower: so in the six branches that come out of the candlestick. And in the candlestick shall be four bowls made like unto almonds, with their knops and their flowers. And there shall be a knop under two branches of the same, and a knop under two branches of the same, and a knop under two branches of the same, according to the six branches that proceed out of the candlestick. Their knops and their branches shall be of the same: all it shall be one beaten work of pure gold. And thou shalt make the seven lamps thereof: and they shall light the lamps thereof, that they may give light over against it. And the tongs thereof, and the snuff dishes thereof, shall be of pure gold. Of a talent of pure gold shall he make it, with all these vessels. And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount."*

Again, we will look at just two of the details of the "Golden Candlestick" in the passage.

**First:** The Golden Candlestick and ALL OF ITS COMPONENTS are made of "pure gold." There is NO WOOD in the Lampstand nor in any part of the lampstand. This clearly tells us that "man" has NO part in the "power of God." Simply put, "God does not need our help." God does not want our help. God is not interested in the world seeing what "man can do for God." God wants the world to see "what God can do for man." God only needs two abilities from you and me as men: He needs our "Availability and Dependability." God will do the rest!

When Jesus Christ came to earth and took on the "form of a man," He did everything he did in the "Power of the Holy Spirit." Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit to "preach the gospel" (Luke 4:18). He was empowered by the Holy Spirit to "cast out demons" (Matthew 10:38). He was empowered by the Holy Spirit to do everything in between those two matters! God commanded us to be "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). If Jesus Christ used the "power of the Holy Spirit," clearly, we should use the "power of the Holy Spirit." Not one time did Jesus Christ resort to "using any type of worldly power" to do anything that He did. We should make our lives "after the pattern" that has been showed us. Amen!

**Second:** The Lampstand, nor any component of the Lampstand, has any measurements. That tells us that the "Power of the Holy Spirit" is **unlimited!** It is all we need to serve God. It is all God ever intended for us to use to serve him, in our life or in our church! To use any type of "worldly power" in God's work is to "swing the axe handle" but there is no cutting edge!

We have established that the "power of the Holy Spirit" is all that we need, and it is the ONLY power that God ever intended for us to use. It is wicked and foolish to try and serve God with human abilities and worldly methods! HE DOES NOT NEED OUR HELP! Now, let's return to the young man who "lost the axe head."

### **WHEN HE LOST HIS "CUTTING EDGE" HE WAS PAINFULLY CONSCIOUS OF THE LOSS**

When the "axe head" was lost, the young man was very much aware. To add to the problem the young man knew that "the axe head he lost" was borrowed! Stop and think a minute. That young man started out with the Power of God. That young man "knew he had the power of God." That young man "knew it was not by his own power" that he was cutting trees. He had been cutting trees and cutting trees, but now, "he lost his cutting edge!"

It is bad enough to lose something which belongs to us. It should trouble us far worse when we lose something that we have borrowed from someone else, in this case, borrowed from God the Father! Sad to say, many men in the ministry today will lose the power of God but will not admit it. The only hope anyone has of regaining the power of the Holy Spirit is to "admit" you have lost it.

#### ***When He Lost his "Cutting Edge" He Stopped Working Immediately***

The problem today is that far too many men today refuse to "admit" that they have lost the power of the Holy Spirit, and they continue to "swing the axe handle." That always leads to "bringing in worldly methods to attract a crowd." They work hard, look busy, but "no chips are flying!" Someone has well said, "The problem fundamental Baptist churches are having today is "the fire in the furnace has gone out, but the blower is still blowing!"

#### ***When He Lost the "Cutting Edge" He Cried to "the Man of God"***

*"But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed. And the man of God said"*

#### ***The Man of God asked "one" question: "Where fell it?"***

The first step in recovering the "axe head" is to get alone with God and admit you have lost the "power of the Holy Spirit." The first thing God is going to ask you is, "Where fell it - Where did you lose it?" Don't get me wrong. God knows where you lost it. It is like in Genesis 32:27, where God asked Jacob, "What is thy name? And he said, Jacob." God knew Jacob's name. Jacob's name met "Trickster." God wanted Jacob to acknowledge what his problem was! God wants you and me to acknowledge where we lost the "cutting edge!" You will never recover the lost power of God until you go back to where you lost it! When the young man was asked the question, ***"Where fell it? And he showed him the place..."***

Some 25 years ago, I received a call from a pastor who had just take the position of pastor at a church which I was very familiar with. The church had gone through a number of problems, serious problems, and the congregation had gone down from 650-700 to about 75 people over a

five-year period. The former pastor had, "knowingly and willingly" done things that God was not pleased with. He had willfully mistreated a number of people and caused them a great hardship. That pastor had recently resigned due the situation and actions. They were "contrary to the Word of God!"

The new pastor wanted to have lunch with me. He was very honest and "up-front" with me. He said, "I understand that you are most likely one of the last of the historians of \_\_\_ Baptist Church and I would like to know the history of the church and why it has gone down so badly after being such a great church." I agreed to meet and have lunch with him. Again, he was exceptionally nice.

After we ate, he opened the conversation and started asking questions. I was very reluctant to talk about, especially to name names, regarding the problems. I tried to "side-step" the matter, but he continued, in a good way, to press me for an answer as to what caused the church to go down so far. After more than an hour, I said, "Okay my brother, I'll share some of the problems, but please remember, you asked me. I have not volunteered anything and am reluctant to talk about this. I would share some of the problems if you agree to keep my name out of any conversation you have with the church or anyone in the church. They know the problems!" He agreed.

Without going into names, places, or details, I shared what had gone on in the church. I tried to be very candid so there was no misunderstanding, but without being ugly, about when, where, who, what and why. I began where the problem began and walked him through, in chronological order, up to the time when the old pastor left. After about hour, the pastor I was meeting with, who was very grateful, thanked me for sharing those things with him. But, he said, "All of that is in the past and all happened before I came here as the new pastor. I'm am going to put that behind us, move forward, and start over fresh and anew."

I was gracious, but said to him, "Brother\_\_\_, you can do that if you want to, but, if you do "put it behind you and not deal with the problem, then you will never have the blessing of God on your ministry or on the work of the church." I repeated, "You can do that, as it is your choice, but if you handle it that way and if you do not deal with the "sin problem" in the church, please do not expect to have the blessings of God on the church. I realize this does not involve you, but it does involve \_\_\_Baptist Church." I continued by saying, "At this point, in my opinion, I believe God has written 'Ichabod' over that church, and God will withhold His blessing until the church deals with the problems, and makes some things right with the people they hurt." I continued by telling him, "The people of the church, especially the deacons, are well aware of what has taken place."

I said, "You can't start over fresh and anew and have God's blessing. The church has to go back up stream and get the 'log-jam of sin' out of the creek, before the blessing of God will flow." The church never dealt with the problem. Over those 25 years they have had a few people come in from time to time, and join the church, but they have also had a few people leave and go other places. Today, 25 years later, they continue to have about 60 people on a good Sunday morning, and **"...he is painfully conscious of it!"**

God said, "Where fell it?" Until you "point to the place you lost the axe head" you may continue "swinging the axe handle" but there will not be ANY trees falling! The cutting edge is gone!" **If you want God's blessing - point to the place you lost it!** If you are content with your ministry the way it is, just keep "swinging the axe handle."

## HOW DO MEN "LOSE THE CUTTING EDGE?"

Men and churches in America, as well as missionaries who may be serving somewhere around the world, lose their "cutting edge" in **one of two ways**. You will ALWAYS lose the power of God in your life in one of these two ways.

### FIRST IF YOU HAVE SIN IN YOUR LIFE YOU WILL LOSE THE CUTTING EDGE

Sin in the life of a Christian is so grievous to the heart of God that God, through the pen of David, said,

*"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me..."* (Psalms 66:18)

I do not think any further explanation is necessary on this subject. If God will not hear your prayers because of sin in your life – clearly, "the cutting edge is gone." Unconfessed sin in the life of any Christian will also cause them to "immediately" lose their "cutting edge." There is no way of getting that power back without them confessing the sin, repenting of the sin, and, when the situation calls for it, **"making it right."** You CANNOT "put it behind you and start afresh and anew!"

### SECOND IF YOU ARE "SELF-WILLED" IN YOUR MINISTRY YOU WILL LOSE YOUR CUTTING EDGE

*"If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly, For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; **not self-willed**, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy."* (Titus 1:6-7)

As we shared above from the command which God gave to Moses concerning how he should "build it according to the pattern" God had showed him, God expects you and me to "follow the pattern" which He has showed us! God wants you and me to use the power that He provided, because when we do that, God gets the glory – all of the glory! The power He gave us is sufficient for all that he commanded you and me to do.

Before Christ ascended to Heaven, in Acts chapter one, He gave clear, specific instruction to the disciples, just as He did to Moses. He said,

*"And, being assembled together with them, **commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father**, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. **But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all***



*Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight."*

There is no doubt that the disciples, who now knew and had seen the "risen Christ" were excited and anxious to go out into the cities and to preach the Gospel. However, Christ told them "wait for the promise of the Father." If they would have ignored the command of Christ and gone, they could have put on a big show and drawn a big crowd, but they would be doing nothing but "swinging the axe handle."

### **HOW IS THE LOST "CUTTING EDGE" RECOVERED?**

The "cutting edge" is recovered by resolving the two issues explained above. If there is "sin in your life" or "sin in the church," you recover the "cutting edge" by confessing the sin, repenting of the sin, which means "turn around from going the wrong way and go the right way." It is NOT ENOUGH to confess the sin and turn from it, but we MUST go and "point to the place where it fell" and straighten it up and make things right when there are things that need to be made right.

If a person has been "self-willed" and tried to do thing "their way" instead of God's way, again, he needs to repent and ask God's forgiveness. From that minute forward, the person needs to "follow the pattern" and use the Power He has given us, which is "all sufficient."

*"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen"* (Ephesians 3:20)

It is my prayer that God will use these thoughts to help some to "remember, repent, return" (Revelation 2:5) to God's way and be rewarded in Heaven.

**THE END**